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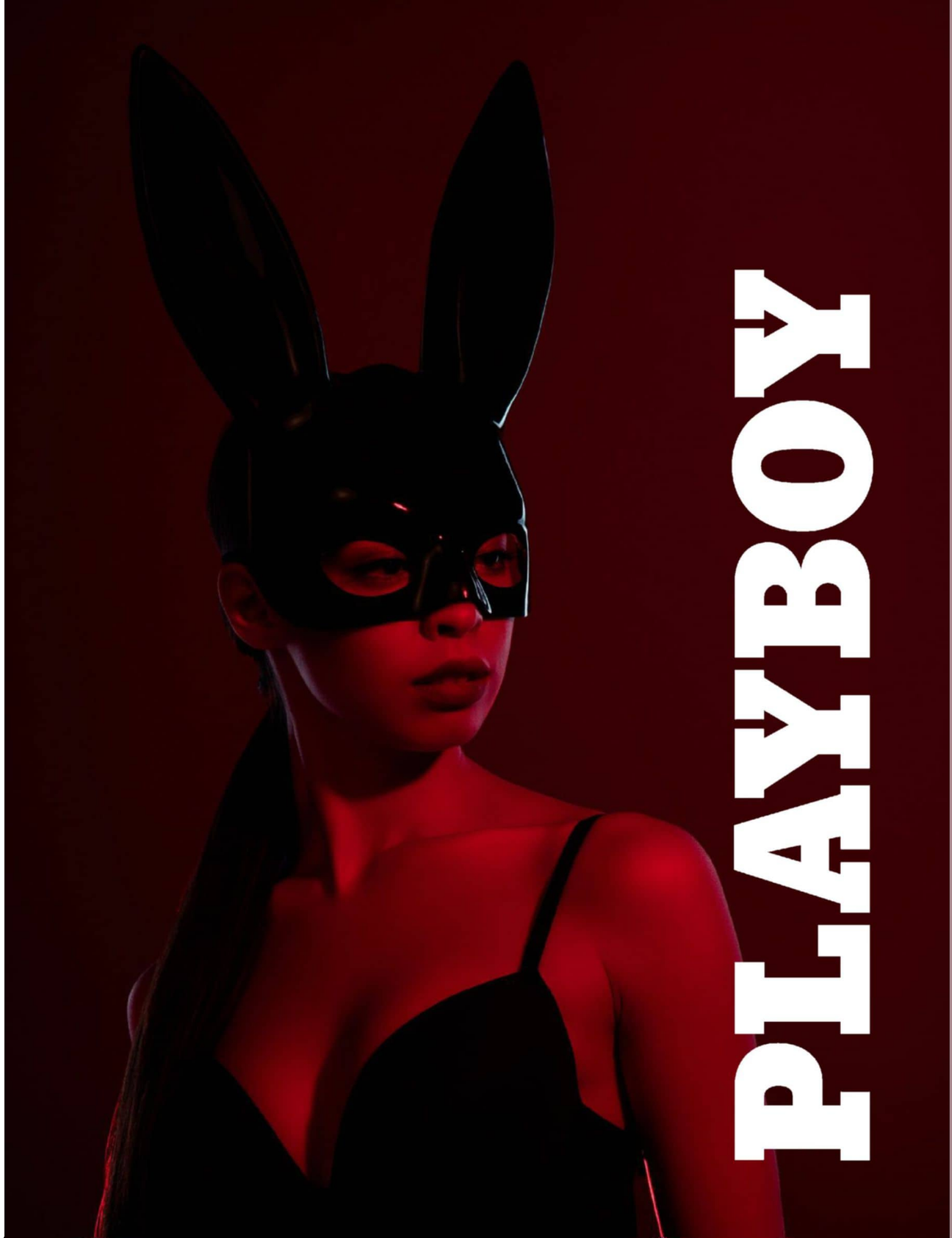


DID THE RICH AND FAMOUS RUIN ONLY-FANS FOR SEX WORKERS?

Recent debacles have highlighted the platform's growing pains

BY **ALEX THOMAS**
PHOTO BY **PARILOV**

When Bella Thorne joined OnlyFans and crashed the site in August, it was the least surprising thing to happen on the platform. OnlyFans had been aimed toward a moment like Thorne's for a while; similarly, the adult industry had been heading for a moment like the rise of OnlyFans for years.

If you're not familiar with her work, Thorne achieved C-list mainstream fame first on the Disney Channel sitcom Shake It Up, which ran from 2010 to 2013, and subsequently in Adam Sandler's 2014 movie Blended and a 2015 Alvin and the Chipmunks sequel. She wasn't exactly famous, but was notable in that auxiliary sort of way where people recognized her name after you read her IMDb page aloud to them.

In the first week after she joined OnlyFans, Thorne told the Los Angeles Times, she made $2 million by charging a subscription rate of $20 per month. It was a massive payday that had a number of consequences. First, everybody was suddenly talking about OnlyFans and everybody was talking suddenly about Bella Thorne.

Recently, OnlyFans has been pushing hard for influencers outside of sex work to join their platform.

But the immediate rise to relevance was not smooth. Some of Thorne's subscribers claimed she charged $200 for a photo she had allegedly promoted as "nude" but that didn't fulfill that description. They demanded their money back from OnlyFans and the platform made a number of changes, including reducing the ceiling for tips to $100.

OnlyFans has denied that the changes were a result of Thorne's $2 million haul, but sex workers were unconvinced. In a statement, OnlyFans told Playboy, "All policy changes are thoughtfully implemented with the safety and support for our users and content creators at top of mind. Our objective remains to provide the best platform possible for the OnlyFans community. We can confirm that any changes to transaction limits are not based on any one user."

The platform also said "verified" creators can receive $200 per tip, explaining, "the new max individual tip a user can give to a creator is limited to $100 initially. After they are verified, it goes up to $200." But multiple verified creators who spoke to Playboy said the tip ceiling on their accounts is $100, not the $200 figure OnlyFans cited.

Sex workers on the platform have been periodically frustrated with the Kafkaesque nature of OnlyFans for months, and most weren't surprised when Thorne's entrance shook the platform. "She's not the first celebrity to do this," OnlyFans creator and porn star Joslyn Jane says. "She was the big name that blew it out of the water because she made so much money, but it's been going on for a while."

Another glaring reason Thorne's appearance on OnlyFans infuriated so many sex workers on the platform was her apparent disregard for their community. After she crashed the site and the pay scale was changed, Thorne offered differing explanations. None of them were particularly convincing. Initially, she claimed she was making a movie with filmmaker Sean Baker. But Baker, who did not respond to requests for comment from Playboy, immediately shot down that statement, saying in a tweet, "I'm NOT attached to this project.… Earlier this month, I had a conversation with Ms. Thorne and discussed a possible collaboration in the far future that would focus on her life and the circumstances leading her to joining OnlyFans."

"On that call," he added, "I advised her team to consult with sex workers and address the way she went about this as to NOT hurt the sex work industry. This has been the extent of my involvement."

After Baker's denial, Thorne posted a string of tweets, saying she hoped to "remove the stigma behind sex, sex work, and the negativity that surrounds the word SEX itself by bringing a mainstream face to it. [That's] what I was trying to do, to help bring more faces to the site to create more revenue for content creators on the site."

In another tweet, she issued an apology to sex workers on the platform. "I am a mainstream face and when you have a voice, a platform, you try to use [it] in helping others and advocate for something bigger than yourself," she wrote. "Again in this process I hurt you and for that I'm truly sorry." Thorne also claimed she was meeting with OnlyFans "about the new restrictions." OnlyFans has not responded to Playboy's request for a comment on that dialogue or whether it even materialized.

UNLV gender and sexuality studies professor Lynn Comella, who co-authored the 2015 book New Views on Pornography: Sexuality, Politics, and the Law, told Playboy, "One of the things this moment reveals to me is a real naivete—and I think it has to be called that—on the part of Bella Thorne, to do whatever it was she thought she was doing. And it's not even clear what she was doing, because her story has changed. Was it a PR stunt? Was it research, as she said, for some kind of project?"

Comella also said Thorne's rationale that her mainstream face on OnlyFans would destigmatize sex work was "problematic."

Mainstream celebrities like Thorne joining OnlyFans brought legitimacy and name recognition to the platform. Cardi B announced on Instagram in August that she was joining OnlyFans, but, unlike Thorne, she said during that announcement that she wouldn't be nude on the site. The site also enjoyed entrance to the annals of pop culture fame when Beyoncé name-checked it in a remix of Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage." OnlyFans quickly responded by issuing a statement to Rolling Stone saying, "Beyoncé, and any artist, are welcome to join OnlyFans at any time to foster a deeper connection with their fans."

Recently, OnlyFans has been pushing hard for influencers outside of sex work to join their platform. On Twitter, they constantly draw attention to those new creators. In a September 7 tweet, they wrote, "Calling all influencers! Time to monetise your content and connect with your fans like never before!"

That campaign has led many sex workers on the platform to fear that OnlyFans will someday push them off the platform they helped build. "It's pretty pervasive," says Kate Kennedy when asked about that fear. "I don't know that it's well-founded. OnlyFans still makes the vast majority of its money off sex workers."

"I know some people who are now doing a lot more PG stuff and a lot less adult stuff on their OnlyFans," Jane says. "A lot of people believe that because all these famous people are joining OnlyFans now and OnlyFans is pushing them to join the platform, it's no longer going to be an adult site. That's the fear a lot of people have."

Sex worker advocate Kate D'Adamo echoed those fears. "Everyone should be really conscious about that possibility—sex workers building the profile of a website and then being removed from that website as soon as it becomes more mainstream," she says. "Look at Tumblr. Sex work and sex literally made it relevant, and then sex workers got kicked off. The platforms that have allowed sex workers to stay have been targeted hardcore. Backpage got a lot of bad press and then [its founders] got charged with facilitating prostitution."

Look at Tumblr. Sex work and sex literally made it relevant, and then sex workers got kicked off.

"The idea that a website is going to take on that liability—I don't trust any website," D'Adamo added.

Platforms that mirror OnlyFans have been appearing en masse for the past several months. "I definitely think that now, a lot of companies are going to start to emerge that are going to be competing with OnlyFans," Jane says.

But sex workers on OnlyFans note that running their profiles on a platform is a full-time job, and branching out to other platforms stretches them thin. "It's always smart, as a sex worker, to diversify your online presence as much as you are able to," Kennedy says. "While the spirit of that advice is good, the reality of it is that asking one person to manage 10 different social media platforms is a lot."

"That impacts your money as well, because they have a tendency to cannibalize each other," she says. "My advice has always been to make one your focus, but have the rest of them so if one goes down, you can bring the others up really quickly."

Although Thorne's entrance to OnlyFans and her massive payout was a very clearly defined moment in the life of the platform, sex workers are now at a much looser moment on OnlyFans. They have been eyeing it suspiciously but hopefully—with few options available to their industry. But the future of the industry and what platforms it functions on is much less obvious.

Survivors DESERVE *Good Sex,* TOO

As the cultural dialogue around sex ed evolves, people are demanding sex education that encompasses all experiences—even the violent, traumatizing ones. The rise of the #MeToo movement has brought about a new cultural narrative surrounding how we discuss sexual violence, but when survivors seek support to reintegrate pleasure and sex in their lives, who is capable of best supporting them?

So much of the conversation around survivors excludes pleasure. A group of trauma-focused sex educators are working to change that.

That's where trauma-informed sexuality professionals come in.

Being a trauma-informed sexuality professional is an incredibly vital niche within the field and one that a growing number of professionals are embracing. But what does that balance of self-care and caring for others—especially in such a heavy niche—actually look like? I spoke with two trauma-informed sexuality professionals about their work, and why survivors of violence need sexuality professionals to support them.

What does it mean to be a trauma-informed sexuality professional?

For Sarah Brynn Holliday, a sexuality speaker and writer who works with survivors on healing and pleasure after trauma, it is understanding there are many ways trauma can affect sex and pleasure. "We're often led to believe sexual violence is the sole trauma that impacts our relationships with our bodies, our sexualities, ourselves and our partners, but trauma is broad," Holliday says.

"Chronic illness, death of a loved one or an abuser, pregnancy loss, religious trauma, systemic and historical violence and oppression, mass trauma, and generational trauma all have an effect on how we experience sex and pleasure," Holliday explains. "Being a trauma-informed sexuality professional means creating and facilitating space for survivors to explore those complexities and intricacies of trauma—and what it means to heal."

Janis Luna, a sex work–affirming therapist and sex educator, carries much of this into her practice.

"Being trauma-informed is two-fold," Luna says. "First, it means I have the responsibility to keep educating myself about trauma from multiple perspectives. Trauma is not just isolated incidents of violence. Intergenerational trauma is not only a biological phenomenon, but also has deep roots in history and culture. Practicing in the United States as a social worker means I have an ethical responsibility to make an ongoing study of the historical and social context of intergenerational trauma within the specific white supremacist history of the United States."

"The second part of being trauma-informed involves not only having a basis of professional knowledge around trauma, but also not trying to impose that on my clients because it fits into my schema of what trauma is, based on my education or supposed 'expertise,'" Luna says. "The most important part of being trauma-informed is being able to meet my clients where they are in their understanding of their trauma, and holding space with them rather than trying to impose my own agenda or change them."

What's a major misconception people have about being a trauma-informed sexuality professional?

"There are two that come to mind," Holliday says. "First, that survivors have to adhere to the 'good survivor' narrative: the expectation that survivors must be calm, silent, agreeable and forgiving—that we can never be angry or set boundaries."

"The second is balancing my own status as a survivor of multiple traumas while working with other survivors," Holliday continues. "I often field messages from people looking for support, resources or just someone to talk to. I want to offer as much help as I can, but there are some days when I can't bear putting my pain on display. Many trauma-informed educators find their way to this field because they're survivors themselves—it can be tricky navigating supporting our communities and taking care of ourselves."

"People think I magically fix people, or that I make trauma go away," Luna says. "But from what I know from my own experiences of trauma and from my deepening understanding of trauma and healing from nonwhite perspectives, trauma doesn't magically disappear. Trauma is a shapeshifter."

"When I think of working with trauma, I think of the idea of integration more than fixing," Luna explains. "How can we integrate our painful experiences into our lives in a way that allows us to feel whole and centered in the fullness of who we are? How can we make space for our trauma? How can we claim space for our joy and our pleasure? How can we be aware of our relationship to our trauma and be intentional with it? A lot of it has to do with courage and self-awareness, so those are values I bring into my work."

In such an intense niche, it's important that professionals make time to center their own self-care. What does that look like?

Holliday's self-care includes both therapy and hobbies. "I try to be as gentle with myself as possible and set limits on how much I work on trauma-focused projects each day," Holliday says. "Horror novels, symphonic metal and taking walks around town also help me clear my head."

Luna shares Holliday's approach to self-care. "I've been in therapy for the past four years, consistently, and I'll likely have to stay in therapy for as long as I'm a therapist," Luna says. "I also move a lot—dancing, exercise, yoga, stretching. It's important for me to stay connected to my body because it reminds me of the uniqueness of who I am. My body is my boundary: I am myself, separate, with my own experiences, hurts and joys. I also journal and read a lot; cook big, delicious meals; go for long walks with my dog, who is the happiest and most present creature I've ever met; and spend time with my family doing a lot of work around our own intergenerational trauma. It's difficult, but it also strengthens my empathy muscles and makes me a better therapist because I'm in the thick of it just like my clients are—just like we all are."

Being a trauma-informed sexuality professional is growing in importance as sexual violence becomes more prominent in popular culture. If someone is interested in working in this niche, what should they do?

Holliday says the best approach is to build a community. "Whether it's online, in person or both, connecting with other trauma-informed sexuality professionals is a great way to learn tips and best practices, collaborate on projects and educate yourself," Holliday says. "It can be intimidating to just jump in, but I'd recommend starting with Twitter and Instagram accounts to establish yourself in the field and attending conferences such as Sex Down South. If you're drawn to teaching, reach out to a local community center or feminist sex shop and pitch a workshop idea. Whatever avenue you choose, just come! We need you."

Luna's advice echoes Holliday's, with some much-needed encouragement: "Be brave. It isn't easy, and a lot of our own stuff gets triggered by our clients' pain and trauma histories. It can be really hard, but if it's something you know you want to do, it's worth it. Most importantly, be brave enough to be vulnerable—with your clients and also with yourself."

"How can we integrate our painful experiences into our lives in a way that allows us to feel whole? How can we claim space for our joy and our pleasure?"

BY **CAMERON GLOVER** PHOTO BY **R KORPA / DANIEL FARÒ**

BE
YOUR
OWN
FANTASY

Caroline Jaquish

Photography by **Greg Woodson | @gregwoodson**

Model **@carolinejaquish**

Do you feel more powerful when you're glamorous, playful, or raw and natural? All of the above. I'm a chameleon. Glamorous is the fantasy, playful is the invitation, and raw is where you fall in love. My power is that I can be all three in one breath.

What do you believe makes true beauty: appearance, confidence, or soul? Soul, always. Beauty without soul is decoration. When your energy is contagious and your heart is open, people feel you before they even look at you.

What's the best "wardrobe malfunction" story that you can now laugh about? During a beach shoot, a wave and a bikini bottom had a little disagreement. For a split second, I froze, then I just laughed it off. And to be honest, the laughter made the photos even hotter. It reminded me that desire isn't about control, it's about flow.

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? My imagination. It's my sharpest weapon, my safest place, and my favorite form of company.

What are some of the things that attract you to a man? Intelligence, humor, and emotional depth are everything. I want someone who makes me feel safe being soft.

3 ultimate deal breakers when it comes to men? Disrespect, arrogance, and lack of purpose. I don't need a man to complete me, but I can only love one who's complete within himself.

How do you nurture your self-love and mental strength? By being gentle with myself. I used to romanticize the hustle; now I romanticize peace. I treat my body, my home, and my mornings like rituals.

What is your life motto? Or a quote that means a lot to you? "Appreciation makes what is great in others belong to us as well" - Voltaire. This quote sums up life for me. I used to work as a hospice caregiver, and in those sacred final moments, holding the hands of patients, I felt nothing but appreciation. For life, for death, and for the fleeting moments that seem to bring us real purpose.

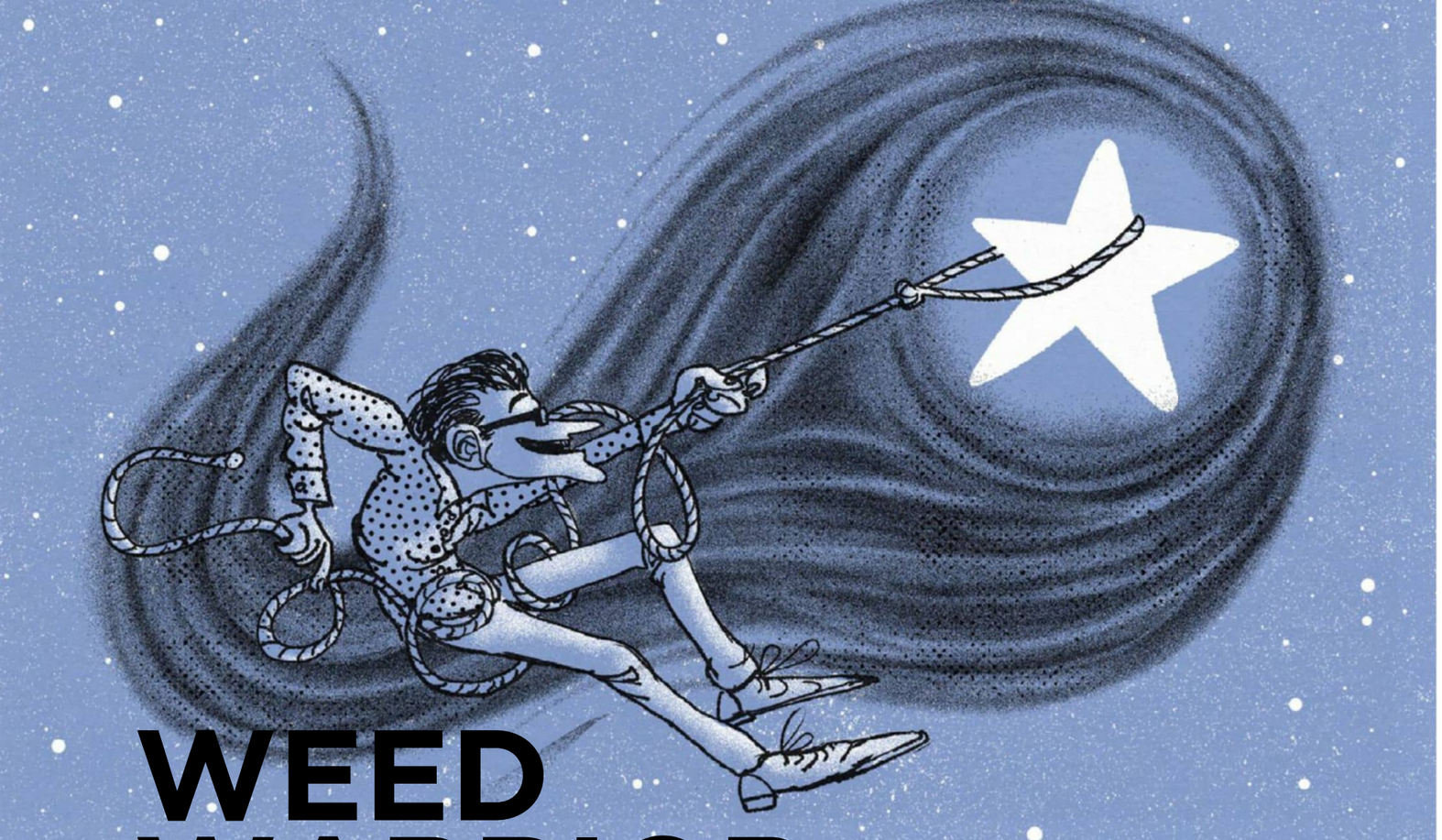
What message do you hope women take from your journey? That femininity isn't weakness. You don't have to be loud to be powerful. The women who know how to move with grace, intuition, and sensual self-respect are the ones who change everything.

What's the most daring photoshoot you've ever done, and did it push your limits? A shoot where the photographer and I were far into the ocean, pitch black night, nothing guiding us, but the flash of a camera.

Which is more thrilling for you, the moment the camera clicks or the reaction from fans? The click. That sound is my heartbeat these days. It's the second I step fully into character.

What message do you hope women take from your journey? Stop waiting to be chosen. Choose yourself first, and the right person will resonate with you. Trust that love is waiting for you.

Lastly, if you had to give your followers one piece of advice for leading a fulfilling life, what would it be? Be your own fantasy. Give yourself the freedom to be whoever you want to be in this life. It is too short to be another carbon copy of the people on your feed. The world doesn't need another imitation. It needs your version of wild, soft, and alive. The moment you stop trying to fit in, you become unforgettable.



WEED WARRIOR

TRANSFORMING THE IMPOSSIBLE INTO THE INEVITABLE

When it comes to the quest for legal weed, never taking "no" for an answer has been the key to ending cannabis prohibition

BY **ANDREW DEANGELO** ILLUSTRATION BY **ROB STITES**

For as long as I can remember, I've been an idealist. Even as a child, I thought anything was possible. Case in point: After my parents split up when I was in kindergarten, I always believed they'd get back together—or, at the very least, forgive each other. They never did.

At age 15, I got bit by two bugs at once: theater and cannabis. I was convinced I'd not only become the next Jack Nicholson but would also legalize weed along the way. Throughout college and graduate school I worked hard at both.

From the start, I was told legalizing weed would be, by far, the more difficult of these dreams. Impossible was the word used by my parents, professors, peers and society as a whole. Yet as it happens, it was the dream of becoming a movie star that eluded me, despite a lot of hard work and effort, and not my efforts to end cannabis prohibition.

I enjoyed cannabis and I was good at trading it. My acting skills enabled me to hide my ventures well from the world and, for the most part, not get caught. My athletic skills (I'd wanted to be a pro tennis player but had been sidelined by injuries) gave me endurance and discipline few weed dealers had. But I hated being a criminal, so I invested my profits and worked with others to change cannabis laws.

For many years we made little progress. The war on drugs was all the rage. Even the Democrats were tripping over themselves to lock people up for weed—and for long sentences, with no hope of change in sight.

But I kept at it, my family kept at it, the movement kept at it and in the early to mid-1990s, we began to break the grip of cannabis prohibition. The tipping point came in San Francisco in the midst of the AIDS crisis: During our darkest moment of enduring that virus, our community discovered just how powerful a medicine cannabis can be. We shared that story with the world, and modern medical cannabis was born. Twenty years later we did it again with easing the suffering of epileptic children, allowing even the most conservative communities around the world to embrace medical cannabis.

The journey was brutally hard and, in many respects, continues to be. Cannabis legalization has not yet occurred on the federal level and has not rolled out smoothly at the state level. It turns out creating regulatory and tax frameworks for cannabis after nearly 100 years of prohibition is damn near impossible—at least, that's what we've been told as we've clamored and clawed for a less absurd and more logical system. Advocates in the cannabis community know it's not impossible; on the contrary, regulating and taxing cannabis should be a helluva lot easier than enforcing prohibition. And yet whenever we present rational solutions for legalization, we're once again confronted with that phrase we've heard for generations: But that would be impossible. Time will tell if we can outmaneuver politicians shoving impossible down our throats and activate the inevitable promise of affordable access to cannabis for all.

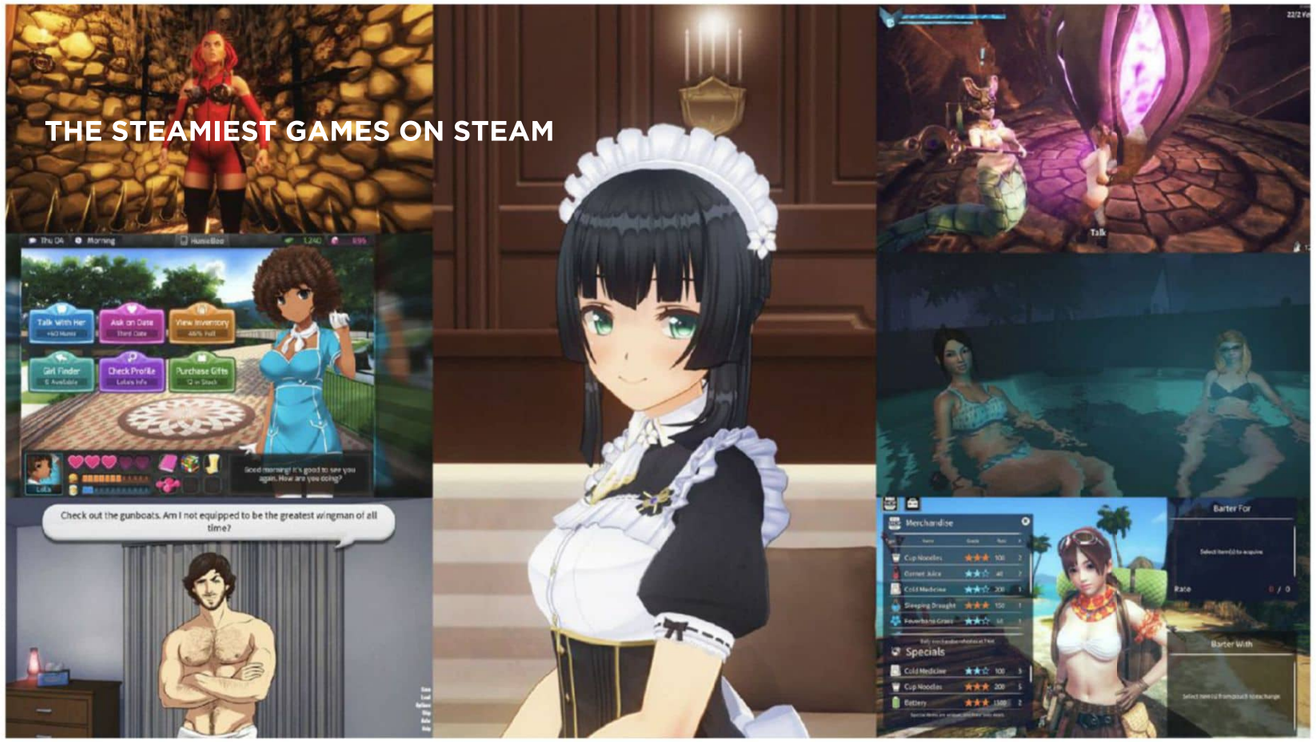
Our type of impossible is not the same kind of impossible as ending slavery or Jim Crow, restoring Native American rights, women's rights, legalizing gay marriage or any number of other movements whose shoulders we stand upon. Our movement is unique but similar to these other movements in that our mission is so aligned with the moral arc of the universe that the outcome is inevitable, not impossible.

Our mission is so aligned with the moral arc of the universe that the outcome is inevitable, not impossible.

Today a very different virus from the one that first spurred a wider embrace of medical cannabis decades ago is affecting everyone around the world. Lo and behold, seemingly impossible things are coming to life all around us. Shut down the U.S. economy? Possible. Pass a massive economic stimulus? Possible. Stop consuming so much oil and fossil fuels? Possible. Put human life first and money second? Possible.

At long last, after a lifetime of this insanity, the world is finally catching up and seeing just how possible impossible is when we want it badly enough.

FOR MATURE PLAYERS *ONLY*



From triple-X sex and NSFW fantasy to heart-warming relationships and hilarious dating send-ups, these adult-themed video games will have you coming back for more

BY **BRITTANY VINCENT**

Sure, certain popular blockbuster video games are well-known for dabbling in light sexual situations and romance (looking at you, The Last of Us Part II and The Witcher). But what if you want the really juicy content—explicit sex scenes, jiggly body bits, graphic language—that most triple-A publishers are reluctant to put out?

Steam, the online game platform and storefront, has become a go-to resource for players looking for titles that aren't afraid of a little flesh and action. We're talking full-frontal nudity, explicit story lines and all that delicious adult content you might otherwise seek out via porn. Which games are actually worth your time and money? We waded through a sea of sexy (and not so sexy) titles to bring you a list of some of the most tantalizing titles on the platform.

Boobs Saga
This cheap Dark Souls imitator is a silly, raunchy ride through a series of dungeons with a singular goal: "saving your boobs" from the evil king. That means your character, a well-endowed young woman (or a furry!), must have sex with demons, avoid traps and navigate vaginal-shaped hallways splattered with, well, you can probably imagine what. Plenty of naked characters in compromising situations litter the gameplay. That this ridiculous concept even exists boggles the mind, but its fun factor is undeniable. Boobs Saga is worth the few bucks for the satirical shock value and amusing juvenile humor alone. ($2.99)

Coming Out on Top
Despite more representation in recent years, LGBTQ-specific story lines and sex scenes still aren't common in the adult gaming landscape. Coming Out on Top, however, has been delivering in droves since its 2014 release. As college senior Mark Matthews, you're ready to come out of the closet and get your date on with 18 different hunks. (A variety of body types are featured, and you can even customize characters' facial and body hair.) You'll come for the crisp, comic-like artwork, but stay for the tasteful and evocative sex scenes that read like some of the best smut you've ever seen. A shining beacon for queer sex in gaming, Coming Out on Top is at the top of any sexy video games list. ($14.99)

HuniePop
What do you get when you cross a match-three puzzler with a dating game featuring seriously sexy babes? HuniePop, which has been delighting players since 2015. Guided by magic love-fairy-cum-wingman Kyu, your mission is to choose a beautiful woman, fall in love and get down and dirty. With your potential partners you'll explore a variety of locations where you'll wine and dine and match wits with the sassy sirens, who must decide whether you're worthy of being allowed into their beds. Imagine Candy Crush Saga crossed with an anime-inspired Bachelor—plus explicit scenes. With multiple unique routes, there's always a reason to come back, again and again. ($9.99)

House Party
Madison is having a party, and she insists you attend. Who are you to decline? (After all, other guests include her voluptuous sister, several buff dudes and a friendly porn star.) This cheeky role-playing game lets you pursue more than 25 story branches, including some that end in sexy hookups. Play through each vignette and you may be rewarded with a peek at a banging body or an up-close encounter with one of the hottest people at the party. An erotically charged adventure tinged with humor—"there's a button to take your pants off"—House Party is the way to go for horny gamers responsible enough to avoid actual packed gatherings during the pandemic. How the night plays out is up to you. ($24.99)

Breeders of the Nephelym
Ah, the animal urge to mate. That drive to breed—no matter with whom or what—is at the center of the fantastical Breeders of the Nephelym. Although the game isn't especially good, it is totally sexy and entertaining. Enter a 3D world where you have to capture Nephelym, monster-human hybrids who are all about mating. To restore peak fertility to the land, you must engage in penetrative or oral sex with these lustful creatures, or breed the Nephelym with each other via a variety of animated positions and combinations. Players must keep lust levels up, strategically bring Nephelym to climax and harvest milk and semen, among other things. Yes, it's absurd, but there's never a dull moment in this adventure. (Free)

AI Shoujo
Picture this: You're stuck on an island paradise with a gorgeous woman whose physical features and wardrobe are up to you. As she comes to life, she learns to think on her own as you interact with her and your tropical surroundings. Before you know it, she's falling in love. Between roaming, gathering and other island necessities, you'll also be getting it on. Naturally, this requires plenty of flirting and ensuring that her needs are met. If you put in the work, you can eventually give and receive pleasure, including watching multiple characters go at it—way more interactive than a Giga Pet. ($69.99)

Custom Order Maid 3D 2: It's a Night Magic
Ever wish you had a live-in maid? Or were in charge of a bevy of beautiful maids? Maids who might tidy in various states of undress? Welcome to the Empire Club, where the room service is at your discretion. Custom Order Maid 3D 2: It's a Night Magic gives you the next best thing to an IRL scenario: VR. To see all the explicit content you'll need to purchase the 18+ pass, but if you're looking to spend some time with beautiful anime-style characters who like posing in cutesy maid outfits (or in nothing at all) in virtual reality, it's worth the entry price. Just don't expect your own bedroom to be any cleaner when you're done playing with these maids. ($40, Japanese-language with English subtitles.)

Playboy Interview

Derek Jeter

A candid conversation with the Yankees star about coping with George Steinbrenner, teaming with A-Rod and why he reads the gossip page before the sports page

INTERVIEW BY **DIANE K. SHAH** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **C.J. WALKER**

In a sport oddly denuded of household names and true superstars, Derek Jeter stands tall. The New York Yankee is more than just one of the game's best players; for years he's been a media darling in the world's most fickle city. The 29-year-old shortstop turns up in gossip columns almost as frequently as he does in the sports pages. He has been linked to scores of beautiful and high-profile women. The New York Post recently ranked Jeter number one on its year-end list of the city's 34 most eligible guys. For denizens of the Big Apple, Jeter has been Mr. Baseball, pure and simple. Life's been good.

And then A-Rod came into town. In February, when the Yankees signed Alex Rodriguez, widely touted as the game's best player, sportswriters wondered what it would mean—to Jeter. Complicating the issue, the former Texas Ranger is a shortstop with two Gold Gloves (Jeter has none) who had to move to third base when he signed with the Yankees. More drama? The two men had once been the closest of friends, but they had a falling-out three years ago. For gossip-crazed New Yorkers, theirs has become one of the most closely watched relationships in town.

While A-Rod was voted last year's American League Most Valuable Player, Jeter is no slouch. Now in the fourth year of a 10-year,$189 million contract, Jeter owns a .317 career batting average. He has played in the postseason in every one of his eight seasons and often saves his best for October. In 2000, when the Yankees beat the crosstown Mets in the World Series in five games, he was named series MVP. And although the Anaheim Angels wiped out the Yanks in the first round of the 2002 postseason, Jeter hit .500. Last spring Yankees owner George Steinbrenner named him team captain, only the 11th in franchise history.

Off the field Jeter is also a player, known for his dalliances with Mariah Carey, a former Miss Universe and a bevy of models and actresses. As Yankees broadcaster Charley Steiner put it, "If the Yankees are the Beatles, Derek's the cute one."

The son of a racially mixed couple, Jeter grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan and put on his first Yankees uniform when he was six. In 1992 he was named high school player of the year and was chosen sixth by the Yankees in the June free agent baseball draft. He was voted the American League Rookie of the Year in 1996, his first full season in the majors, and quickly established himself as one of baseball's best all-around players. Jeter's seasonal averages of 207 hits and 124 runs are extraordinary. Long considered the Yankees' leader, he also has a knack for elevating the play of his teammates.

While he's one of baseball's most accessible players, he's one of the most private as well. Like a seasoned politician, Jeter carefully crafts his courteous statements—and sticks to them. Rarely does he lose his composure. "He's kind of vanilla," notes his agent, Casey Close. Conscious of commanding center stage, Jeter admits that he rarely lets down his guard.

We sent journalist Diane K. Shah to Jeter's winter home in Tampa, Florida, where she had to get past the guards posted at his gated community before tackling the more formidable guards in his head.

PLAYBOY: A lot has been made of your relationship with Alex Rodriguez. Until 2001 you referred to him as your best friend. Then, after he signed his $252 million deal with Texas, he said some unflattering things about you through the media—that you never had to serve as a leader and that since you bat second, teams don't worry that you'll beat them. When reporters informed you of this, you said you'd call Alex and talk to him. What happened?
JETER: It was spring training, and he actually came over here the night that came out. Just came by. We talked about it, and that was basically the end of it.
PLAYBOY: We heard that he drove 95 miles from the Rangers' spring-training camp to your house and left phone messages you didn't return. Is that true?
JETER: No. When that stuff went public, I guess it was in the afternoon when I found out about it. We had a game that night, and he drove over while we were playing. So I didn't get the messages that he was at my house until after the game.
PLAYBOY: He was chilling in your driveway?
JETER: He was in the area, but he wasn't in the driveway.
PLAYBOY: Still, you were hurt.
JETER: Sure, it hurts anytime someone you're close to says something you question. But Alex was coming from Seattle and had signed this megadeal. He was on a platform that maybe he'd never been on before. I think he found himself having to defend the reason he got paid so much. Or he was asked, g"If you get this, what's Derek going to get?" So he was comparing us, which I told him shouldn't even be an issue. I said, "You didn't pay yourself. You shouldn't have to answer that question. Let them ask the owner." I think he was saying things that maybe other people had said to him.
PLAYBOY: After that it appeared you two weren't close.
JETER: We weren't as close as we had been. We were still friends. The younger you are, the more time you have when the season is over. Now it seems you do more in the off-season than you do during the season.
PLAYBOY: How did you hear about the trade?
JETER: A couple of people in the organization called me.
PLAYBOY: What were you doing when you got the word?
JETER: No idea. Probably watching TV.
PLAYBOY: The last time you'd seen Alex, when you two were making a commercial, did you talk about the possibility of his becoming a Yankee?
JETER: No, because that was before Aaron Boone tore his ACL. It was right around the time when everything was happening with the potential trade to Boston, and he basically didn't know what was going on.
PLAYBOY: Once A-Rod signed on did anybody ask if you were willing to move to second or third?
JETER: That was never an issue. They approached him about playing third base.
PLAYBOY: Isn't it easier to move from shortstop to second than to third?
JETER: Nah, I wouldn't say that. Turning a double play is totally different from second base than from shortstop. Your back is to first. So I would assume it would be easier to go to third base.
PLAYBOY: How did your teammates react to the news?
JETER: Everyone's pretty excited. You're adding one of the best all-around players in the game to your lineup, so it's only going to make us a better team.
PLAYBOY: Is it true George Steinbrenner ordered you to go to Alex's news conference in New York?
JETER: No, he called me and asked if I wanted to go.
PLAYBOY: Some news accounts reported that he demanded you go.
JETER: See, you can't believe everything you read.
PLAYBOY: To what degree are you amused or bothered by the speculation that you and Alex can't get along?
JETER: Neither of us has had problems getting along with teammates before, so I don't see why we'd have problems now. It gives the media something to write about, though. I think it will eventually die down.
PLAYBOY: You've said you're very competitive. What kinds of things will you be competitive about with Alex?
JETER: Well, we're on the same team, so we really don't have anything to compete for. We're playing a team sport, right?
PLAYBOY: How about your batting average versus his?
JETER: No. I don't go into a season saying I want to bat higher than any one of my teammates. That's not a goal. The goal is to win.
PLAYBOY: Who's funnier?
JETER: I think we're funny in different ways. I'm not sure you can rate us. You'd have to be around both of us to make that decision.
PLAYBOY: We noticed a book on the table in your entryway, Patton on Leadership: Strategic Lessons for Corporate Warfare, by Alan Axelrod. Any particular reason you own that?
JETER: Mr. Steinbrenner gave it to me after the 1998 season.
PLAYBOY: Was it meant to teach you, or was it meant to explain him?
JETER: I think both. A lot of what's in there are things he says: g"If you're going to lead, you've got to sit in the saddle." "You've got to be willing to go out and do the things you ask of the people you're leading." It's pretty interesting.
PLAYBOY: He inscribed it, g"To Derek. Read and study. He was a great leader just as you are and will be a great leader. Hopefully of the men in pinstripes." How would you describe your relationship with Big George?

JETER: It's always boss-employee. He's the boss. But I think we have a really good relationship. I don't know how it could be any better in terms of playing for him.
PLAYBOY: But last year, after he questioned your dedication and your late-night hours, you were pissed off. Was that the first time he publicly criticized you?
JETER: No, he mentioned my name, among other players, when the team was struggling a few years ago. He said some guys needed to start stepping it up. He meant me. But the whole thing last year was blown out of proportion. He mentioned a birthday party. How many birthday parties do you have a year?
PLAYBOY: So Steinbrenner was referring to just one party? Your birthday is in June; he's bringing it up six months later?
JETER: It was my birthday party before a day off. The next thing you knew, I'd been turned into a big party animal. Now you read that all the time—I'm the party animal.
PLAYBOY: Steinbrenner said more than that. He said you g"always give 100 percent. I need 110 percent." And he said, "If I'm paying a guy $16 million, I want him to listen."
JETER: The whole thing was made larger than life. That was the point of those Visa commercials. We got a chance to make light of the situation and put it behind us.
PLAYBOY: Does he expect you to work for him 24-7, 365 days a year?
JETER: Probably. Rightfully so. When you're a Yankee you represent the Yankees at all times. You don't have days off. If I were to get into trouble today, the first thing you'd see is my name associated with the team. So I don't think you have 20 or 30 days off a year from being a Yankee. You're always a Yankee.
PLAYBOY: How about during the offseason? What if you wanted to go out and enjoy somebody's company until three or four in the morning?
JETER: Oh, I'd be out. I'm a grown man. In the off-season I can do whatever I want, whenever I want to do it. He wouldn't call me if he read I was out until such and such an hour in January. He wouldn't say, g"You need to be home."
PLAYBOY: How often do you see Steinbrenner?
JETER: He hasn't been around as much as he used to be. Last season I saw him probably two or three times before the postseason.
PLAYBOY: You both spend your winters in Tampa. Does he ever call you and say, g"Let's get lunch"?
JETER: It's happened maybe once or twice. We usually bet a dinner on the Ohio State-Michigan football game.
PLAYBOY: When you get together, does he have a message for you?
JETER: He always has messages. g"Make sure you focus this year. I need you focused." Or he'll see me working out and say, "Don't get too big, because we need you to have agility."
PLAYBOY: In the first Visa commercial, in which Steinbrenner chastises you for being out carousing every night, was it your idea that he participate in the conga line?
JETER: No, but I was the one who had to persuade him to do it. It wasn't easy. He did it a couple of times, and then he called it quits. Fortunately they got a good take.
PLAYBOY: Is it ever fun seeing your name in the gossip columns?
JETER: Some of the stories are funny. Some of them amaze me. Like one time they said I was renting an island—some island I'd never heard of—for $23,000 a day and that I was bringing one of three girls I'd never heard of for a birthday party. The thing is, people believe it when they read it. I was talking to Wayne Gretzky the other day about his time in New York. He said they made up things about him constantly. He used to get the newspapers and turn to the gossip pages, and when he'd read something about someone else he'd say, g"Really? They did this?" But when he read about himself it was, "Where do they come up with this stuff?" I thought that was funny, because I do the same thing.
PLAYBOY: So you do read the gossip pages?
JETER: Even before the sports section. To make sure I'm not in them.
PLAYBOY: You seem to need to be a perfectionist on the field. Why is that?
JETER: Competition-wise I always want to be perfect. I can't stand losing in anything. If you tell me you want to race down the street right now, I'm going to try to beat you.
PLAYBOY: We're pretty sure you'd win.
JETER: I'll still do everything in my power to beat you, and that started when I was a kid. My dad used to beat me at everything. We'd play checkers, and he would beat me. He would never let me win. Never. We used to watch The Price Is Right, and we'd play the showcase showdown. I didn't know how much a refrigerator or a new car cost—I was six years old. We'd sit there and he'd beat me, and then I'd walk to school.
PLAYBOY: Do you ever wish your dad had let you win?
JETER: No—I think my dad was teaching me lessons. Things don't come easily. People aren't just going to let you get your way. I mean, people aren't going to say, g"Here, you can have this." You have to work for it.
PLAYBOY: You wrote in your book, The Life You Imagine, that you always try to envision something before you do it. Is that because you're conscious of being a role model, or is that just you?
JETER: I think it's me no matter what. When I was younger, before I'd do things I'd imagine what my parents would think. It's the same philosophy I apply today. But now it's more than my parents. Lots of people are watching.
PLAYBOY: It sounds as if you're always watching yourself, like in an out-of-body experience.
JETER: Yes, and I'm pretty much used to it now. I'm always aware that people are watching. There are a lot of things I'd like to do that I can't—or that I choose not to. Say I'm out with some friends and I want to dance on top of a table. I know I can't do that.
PLAYBOY: Doesn't it get tiring, always watching yourself?

"I'll do everything in my power to beat you, and that started when I was a kid. My dad used to beat me at everything. We'd play checkers and he would beat me. He would never let me win. Never."

JETER: Yes, but I don't think it's a bad thing. When you let that guard down, that's when you get in trouble.
PLAYBOY: Last season was a strange one for you, full of highs and lows. Among the lows: In game six of the World Series you went 0 for 4, struck out twice and made an error that led to a Marlins insurance run. Series over. And you suffered three injuries, including a dislocated shoulder on opening day. Was that the most serious injury you've ever had?
JETER: It was the only serious injury I've had. I was out for six weeks.
PLAYBOY: You were heading to third; the catcher, Ken Huckaby, ran over to cover the base, and you slid into his shin guard. What was your first thought?
JETER: I thought maybe I had broken my collarbone, because I felt a pop.
PLAYBOY: Was there instant pain?
JETER: It didn't feel good. I wouldn't recommend it. I was kind of afraid to look at it, because I thought I'd see it coming out.
PLAYBOY: Did they just push it back in?
JETER: They tried initially, on the field, but that didn't work. I just wanted to get off the field, because you have 50,000 people looking at you. It took a while for them to get the golf cart out there. Then finally we went inside and they popped it back in.
PLAYBOY: There was a bit of controversy, because it was reported that Huckaby tried to phone you to apologize but couldn't reach you. Then a day or two later he walked into your locker room to apologize, and you gave him an icy stare.
JETER: Not true. First, I never expected him to apologize, because I didn't think he purposely tried to dislocate my shoulder. Before the second game he told the media he'd tried to call me on my cell phone, I didn't answer and he left a message. That wasn't true. He doesn't have my cell number. If he wanted to get ahold of me, it's only a couple hundred feet from one clubhouse to the other. Or he could have called the trainers' room, because obviously that's where I was. It was all made up. What bothered me was how the thing was portrayed.
PLAYBOY: Late in the season, against Boston, you pulled a rib-cage muscle. How did that happen?
JETER: Swinging. We were facing a knuckleball pitcher, Tim Wakefield. I think I swung a little too hard.
PLAYBOY: Did you finish the at bat?
JETER: Yes. Then I had another at bat and got a hit. I was on first base, and they took me out. I think I missed a week.
PLAYBOY: Then there you were in the first game of the American League Championship Series, Boston again.
JETER: I think it was the second or third inning. I dove for a ball and my hand rolled over, and I tore a ligament in my thumb.
PLAYBOY: Your left thumb.
JETER: It was a bad year for my left side. It takes three or four months for that to heal. They gave me shots before the games against Boston, but I couldn't feel my thumb. So in the World Series I just played with it. They put a little mold thing—a little cast—inside my glove to stop my thumb from moving around.
PLAYBOY: The rivalry between the Yankees and the Red Sox has reached epic proportions, especially with A-Rod now in pinstripes. It isn't just the fans, is it?
JETER: The rivalry has gotten more intense each year I've been in the major leagues. You have respect for the other team, I think, but it's gotten to the point where in the postseason you've got guys throwing at each other's heads and charging the mound. It's almost like the old days, when they used to fight all the time.
PLAYBOY: Some said that in last year's playoffs, the Yankees used up everything against the Red Sox—seven games, the last one going extra innings—and you had nothing left for the Marlins.
JETER: The series with the Red Sox was emotionally draining because all seven games were intense. But I don't think that's why we lost. We lost because Florida played better than we did.
PLAYBOY: Did it take long to get over losing the World Series?
JETER: Yes, I hate to lose. For a while I didn't like to be out and around a lot of people. I pretty much kept to myself. But you never forget it. I still think about us losing. You want to remember what it feels like, because you don't want to have that feeling again. That's what drives you to try to be better.
PLAYBOY: So not only have the Yankees gone three years without a championship, but to add insult to injury, several days after the series you were waiting to go into a movie theater and got heckled by a fan. g"If you hadn't made that error, Jeter, you'd still be playing," she apparently said.
JETER: She was a young girl, and she was yelling about the error I made in game six. And then she said, real sarcastically, g"Better luck next year." She seemed to enjoy it. She was probably a Mets fan.
PLAYBOY: How often do you have to put up with that stuff outside the ballpark?
JETER: In Boston, all the time. That's a whole other world. I actually think I'm public enemy number one there.
PLAYBOY: Considering that the Red Sox nearly signed A-Rod, do you think you'll have to fight him for that title?
JETER: Maybe he can share the load with me. That's what I'm hoping for.
PLAYBOY: Is it difficult for you to go out alone?
JETER: I don't go anywhere by myself, period. You never know when you're going to run into someone who's been drinking and is acting foolish. You like to know that someone is always watching your back.
PLAYBOY: Women recognize you on the street and they squeal. Do you like it?
JETER: It's flattering. It's embarrassing, too. But anytime you get recognized, it means you're being appreciated for some of the things you've done. I don't mind it.
PLAYBOY: How many of your teammates get squealed at?
JETER: They're all married.
PLAYBOY: Let's see, you've dated a Miss Universe, a Victoria's Secret underwear model and an MTV hostess. According to the New York Post, you demand perfection, at least visually, in your dates. Is that true?
JETER: She has to be a beautiful person. She has to be fun. I like to have fun. I'm always smiling. She has to have a sense of humor, because you've got to enjoy life. Intelligent. But I don't sit down and make a blueprint of how someone must look. I guess you just know. The more you get to know someone, you understand if you have things in common.
PLAYBOY: You were once linked with Mariah Carey.
JETER: I was a fan of her music, and then we ran into each other a couple of times in New York.
PLAYBOY: The papers said she stalked you.
JETER: I don't know where they would get that from.
PLAYBOY: The papers also had you practically engaged. Was it that serious?
JETER: We didn't date for as long as people think. I've heard all kinds of things. But it was really just a few months.
PLAYBOY: After it ended you said you realized you couldn't make a relationship work if the other person is famous too. Is that an ego thing?
JETER: Not at all. It's just tough when both people are in the public eye. I'm not saying it can't work, but there are a lot of rumors, a lot of gossip, different schedules.
PLAYBOY: You say you're eager to get married, but do you think you need to finish baseball first?
JETER: Not necessarily. I have to admit. I'm at a selfish point in my life in terms of what I'm trying to accomplish. But there are times when you wish you had someone to share it with.
PLAYBOY: How do you ask a woman out?
JETER: Initially it'll be as part of a group. Like someone will bring their friends, and I'll have my friends. It's easier that way. Because when you do the one-on-one thing, that's when the media get so involved.
PLAYBOY: Have you ever had to explain to a date what you do for a living?
JETER: I say I have a night job.
PLAYBOY: That's it?
JETER: And that I'm in the entertainment business. [smiles]
PLAYBOY: Do you ever get rejected?
JETER: Everyone gets rejected.
PLAYBOY: Are you involved with anybody right now?
JETER: I'm seeing someone in New York.
PLAYBOY: You're in the fourth year of a 10-year contract worth $189 million. You'll be paid $19 million this year. What are your greatest extravagances?
JETER: I get things for other people. But for myself I have a Hummer, a Ferrari and a Mercedes 600. I got this house six, seven years ago, and I'm not planning on leaving. I have a nice apartment in New York.
PLAYBOY: The Hummer has a satellite dish on the roof.
JETER: I just had DirecTV put in. Only now it won't fit in my garage. I've got to build a bigger garage.
PLAYBOY: Did we spot a motorcycle in there?
JETER: A scooter. It was a Christmas gift from Gerald Williams. He used to play for the Yankees. Now he's with the Marlins, and he lives three doors down. He bought one for each of us, but when we tried to ride them in, the guard stopped us at the gate. You can't drive two-wheeled vehicles here. So we had to load them on a truck and bring them in that way. We ride them at night.
PLAYBOY: You're sure it's not a motorcycle?
JETER: [*Laughs*] It's a scooter. I'm not allowed to ride a motorcycle. It's in my contract. Actually, it's not even my scooter. It's a friend's.
PLAYBOY: Right. What else do you spend money on? Clothes?
JETER: I have a lot of suits. I have a tailor in Chicago. He's Michael Jordan's guy, too. But really, I'm not a huge spender.
PLAYBOY: What music do you like?
JETER: All I listen to is hip-hop and R&B—Jay-Z, 50 Cent, Beyonce, R. Kelly. That's pretty much it.
PLAYBOY: Two full seasons have passed, but people are still talking about that miraculous play against Oakland in the 2001 division series. Some say it's the infield equivalent of Willie Mays's catch in the 1954 World Series. The Yankees were down two games to none. If you lost game three, your season would be over. The Yankees were ahead one to nothing. Can you run us through it?
JETER: Jeremy Giambi was on first, there were two outs, and Terrence Long hit a long fly to right that fell in for a double. The second baseman, Alfonso Soriano, was the first cutoff man, and the first baseman, Tino Martinez, was the second cutoff man. But when Shane Spencer picked up the ball in right, he threw it over both their heads.
PLAYBOY: So you had Soriano down the 70 right-field line and Tino near first base. Giambi was steaming for home, right? And you were at short.
JETER: I could see that the throw was going over their heads. And I saw the runner wasn't home yet, so I thought if I could get to the ball and get rid of it quickly, we'd have a chance to get him.
PLAYBOY: From out of nowhere you suddenly materialized at first.
JETER: I fielded the ball between first and home and flipped it as soon as I got it.
PLAYBOY: You flipped it sideways to Jorge Posada at the plate—a perfect throw. Giambi was so shocked to see the ball coming that he didn't even slide. When you saw the highlight film, did the play look different to you than in your mind as you were performing it?
JETER: In my mind everything happened in slow motion. When I watched it later I just looked at it really as what I was supposed to do. We'd practiced that play in spring training.
PLAYBOY: But nobody recalls ever seeing such a play before. Is there a name for it?
JETER: They just call it the Play.

"Yeah, I'm confident. I don't like cocky people. Confidence is how you feel. Cockiness is how you act. I'm always confident. There are times when you struggle, but if a big game is on the line, I expect to do well."

"Alex and I weren't as close as we had been. But neither of us has had problems getting along with teammates before, so I don't see why we would have problems now. It gives the media something to write about, though."

PLAYBOY: Two games later the same guy, Terrence Long, hit a pop-up into foul territory at Yankee Stadium. And you did a belly flop into the seats behind third base and came up with the ball. Was that the second most exciting play you've made?

JETER: I think it was exciting to watch. I don't think it was exciting to do it, because it hurt.

PLAYBOY: What's been your most embarrassing moment on the field?

JETER: We were playing in Minnesota. I'm on third with less than two outs. Someone hits a deep fly ball that bounces over the fence. It's a ground-rule double, so you get two bases, and I automatically score. But I'm still standing on third, tagging up in case the ball is caught. When it bounces over the fence, I turn to go, trip over my shoelaces and fall flat on my face. Then they show it over and over on the Jumbotron.

PLAYBOY: You and Alex are among the most famous baseball players today. Probably fewer than 10 are easily recognizable nationwide, whereas the NBA and the NFL have many more. Why is that?

JETER: They market their sports a lot better. I filmed a commercial with Alex and the Marlins' Josh Beckett for Major League Baseball. It's the first time baseball has done that. It's lagging behind the other sports, but I think now it's putting forth an effort.

PLAYBOY: Baseball also lags behind other sports when it comes to drug testing, especially for steroids. This season you'll be randomly tested. Should performance-enhancing drugs be banned?

JETER: Yes, without question, because they put everyone else at a disadvantage. There's also the public's perception. If someone comes back a little smaller or a little bigger, the first thing people wonder is, Did he take steroids before and isn't taking them now? Or is he using steroids now? I think the whole debate is putting a lot of questions in people's heads.

PLAYBOY: You grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Your dad is black; your mom is white. How did they prepare you for your mixed ethnicity?

JETER: For me it was a normal situation. It was all I knew. We'd get funny looks from people. My parents tried to educate my sister and me about why people would stare. They would say it was because people were seeing something they hadn't seen before.

PLAYBOY: Kids can be mean. Did you have problems?

JETER: Not many, because I played baseball, which was primarily white. Then I played basketball, which was primarily black. So I had a lot of friends. But I remember going back home after my first year in baseball. I had just bought a Mitsubishi 3000. That was the greatest car in the world. So I was back home, and I was eating out with a friend. We went back to the car and were about to leave when some kids drove by. Someone shouted, g"Bring that car back to your dad" and yelled some racial things. I was so proud to come home, and then you have to hear those kinds of things.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel closer to one race than the other?

JETER: No. My best friend is a white guy I've known since fourth grade. My trainer is Puerto Rican. The catcher on our team, Jorge Posada, is Puerto Rican. I was the best man at his wedding. Sean Twitty, a friend from the minors, is Jamaican.

PLAYBOY: You grew up rooting for the Yankees. Didn't you like the Tigers?

JETER: I was born in Jersey, and I used to spend the summers there because my mom had 13 brothers and sisters, and I had all kinds of cousins. My grandmother was a huge Yankees fan, and she turned me on to the team. Also, my dad liked the Tigers. Since we competed in everything, I couldn't root for the same team he did.

PLAYBOY: You've said you always wanted to play baseball because your dad played.

JETER: He played at Fisk University in Tennessee. Growing up I would watch him play in a softball league.

PLAYBOY: And because he was a shortstop, you had to be a shortstop. Apparently you were clocked throwing 93 mph in high school. Didn't you ever want to be a pitcher?

"I'm a grown man. I can do whatever I want, whenever I want. Steinbrenner wouldn't call me if I was out in January. He wouldn't say, 'You need to be home.'"

JETER: I pitched a couple of times in high school, but my arm used to hurt afterward. Plus, I liked to hit. And the shortstop is involved in everything. Shortstop is like quarterback.

PLAYBOY: How much pressure did your clad put on you to excel?

JETER: He never put pressure on me. He always said, g"If you want A, B or C to happen in your life, you have to do certain things. He was tough on us in school. We had to sit down and do our homework for an hour every night. Even if we didn't have homework, we had to sit down and do something school-related for an hour. Obviously it worked. I got good grades.

PLAYBOY: And baseball?

JETER: My mom and dad never pushed me into baseball. For me it was fun. I used to drag them out of the house to help me out. If my dad wasn't home, my mom would throw Wiffle balls in the backyard. The high school was over the back fence, so we'd go to the baseball field. The only thing they said was, g"If you're going to do this, you're going to have to work, and if we don't see you working at it, then it's going to be time for you to find something else to do."

PLAYBOY: You were picked sixth in the 1992 draft. You dreamed of being a Yankee, but wasn't it a long shot that you'd become one?

JETER: It was luck. I mean, the draft is a crapshoot. I thought I'd be selected by Houston or Cincinnati.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of Cincinnati, do you think Pete Rose should be eligible for the Hall of Fame?

JETER: Pete Rose is a Hall of Fame player no matter how you look at it. What he did on the field—there's no question about it. It's just basically how you view what he did off the field. I wouldn't want to be the one to make that decision.

PLAYBOY: After four full seasons with the Yankees you had 795

hits, more than Pete Rose, Ty Cobb, Hank Aaron and Stan Musial had in their first four seasons. Yet unlike most hitters, you don't pay attention to what pitchers are throwing. You just check the radar gun.

JETER: Basically you go on instinct. I just want to know how hard a guy is throwing. Then you have to recognize what kind of pitch it is so you can know if it's going to end up in the strike zone.

PLAYBOY: You have less than a second to do that.

JETER: You can tell from the rotation of the ball. If it's a slider, it's spinning a little differently than a fastball. If it's a two seamer, you'll see two seams.

PLAYBOY: Which indicates if it's going to be low and outside or over the plate.

JETER: That's the plan. Of course, it doesn't always work.

PLAYBOY: Your father once said, g"Derek has more inner arrogance than anybody I've ever met." And during games you look pretty sure of yourself. Is that how you really feel?

JETER: Yeah, I'm confident. I don't like cocky people. Confidence is how you feel. Cockiness is how you act. I'm always confident. There are times when you struggle, like I could be 0 for 100, but if a big game is on the line, I expect to do well.

PLAYBOY: Other than Pedro Martinez, which pitcher has given you the most trouble? Someone we might not think of?

JETER: Roy Halladay of Toronto. He had a great year last season, winning the Cy Young Award. But he's always been tough for me. He throws a real hard sinker. Also, Derek Lowe of the Red Sox.

"If someone comes back a little bigger, the first thing people wonder is, Is he using steroids?"

PLAYBOY: How did you do against Roger Clemens when he pitched for Toronto?

JETER: He hit me a lot. We'd joke about it. He said I leaned over the plate and he was just brushing me back. Rocket is the type you hate to play against but love to have as a teammate.

PLAYBOY: Were you surprised that he signed with Houston three months after supposedly retiring or that Andy Pettitte signed with Houston too?

JETER: I thought Andy would be back. I wasn't completely caught off guard when he signed with Houston, because I knew it was in the back of his mind that one day he'd get an opportunity to pitch at home. We didn't expect Rocket to come back. But who's to tell you when you should stop doing what you love to do?

PLAYBOY: What's a typical day for you during the season?

JETER: I get up around 10, eat breakfast and go to the gym to lift weights for an hour. No treadmill, because we run too much during the season. Then I'll return home, maybe go back to sleep and get to the ballpark around 3:30.

PLAYBOY: Do you have a personal trainer?

JETER: Year-round. He goes where I go. He travels with me to East Coast cities.

PLAYBOY: You're one of those guys who consider their kitchen no-man's-land. Do you live on snack food? Or fast food?

JETER: I can't cook; that's the bad thing. I go to the grocery store and stock up on cereal, oatmeal, Eggos and stuff, and then when it goes bad I'll go back and get more. Otherwise I eat out. My agent got me a chef as a Christmas gift a couple of years ago. He'd have something waiting for me, and I would warm it up. I think I might have to have him come again.

PLAYBOY: You've got a golf course out back. Why haven't you played more?

JETER: My shoulder injury. I messed up my AC joint, so I had to stop playing golf.

PLAYBOY: Is that why you keep grabbing your shoulder? You've been rubbing it the whole time.

JETER: Really?

PLAYBOY: Does it hurt?

JETER: No. It could be a habit, because it used to hurt all the time. Or it could be old age.

PLAYBOY: Have you given any thought to what you might do after baseball?

JETER: I would love to own a team.

PLAYBOY: Like Michael Jordan? Purchase a percentage of a team?

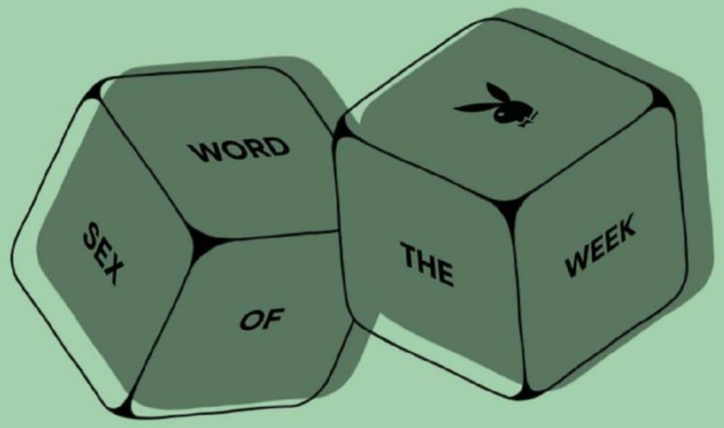
JETER: No, I'd have to be a majority owner. I'd have to make the decisions.

PLAYBOY: You'd probably need to get your hands on a lot more money.

JETER: Probably.

PLAYBOY: How are you going to do that?

JETER: [Smiles] I haven't thought about it yet. But I will.



CannaSexual

WRITTEN BY
ASHLEY MANTA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

CannaSexual (*adj*) describing a methodology centered around mindfully and deliberately combining sex and cannabis to deepen intimacy and enhance pleasure, whether solo or partnered; (*n*) a person who practices such methodology

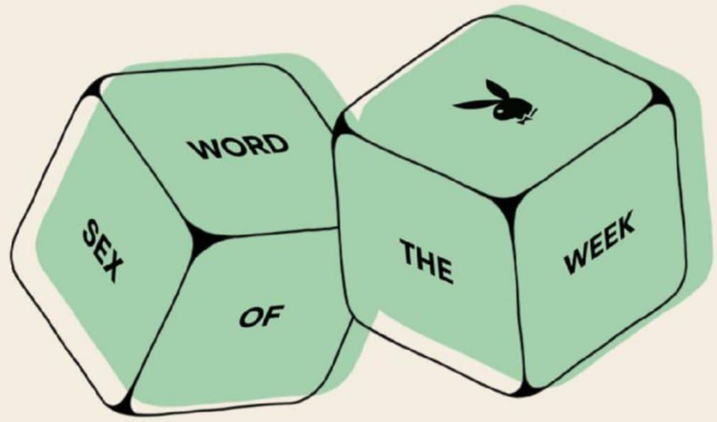
"I want to use cannabis with my partner to improve our sex life, but I don't know where to start!" "Have you tried the CannaSexual approach? It's all about using cannabis intentionally to spark your pleasure!"

CannaSexual was coined in 2014 by award-winning sex and relationship coach Ashley Manta, who has become a leading expert on the intersection of sex and cannabis. The CannaSexual method is intended to be consent-focused, queer-inclusive and trauma-informed. It advocates consuming any new cannabis products solo, then masturbating, to determine how the products impact the user's experience.

For couples, the directive is to "negotiate before you medicate," which means to discuss boundaries, desires and intentions before consuming any cannabis-infused products. Partners should include what products are being used and in what amounts, how to tell if one has over-consumed and how each person wishes to be taken care of if overconsumption occurs.

CannaSexual also highlights that consumers may enjoy the positive impact of cannabis on sexual experiences without intoxication, and encourages the use of topicals and CBD-rich products.

Manta, who has become known as "The CannaSexual," is the cofounder of the Sex and Cannabis Professional Alliance and the author of The CBD Solution: Sex, which will be published September 22. As a sexual violence survivor, she speaks candidly about the many ways in which cannabis products have helped her manage her PTSD symptoms and allowed her to discover greater embodiment and presence in her sexual explorations.



Sumata

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

sumata (*n*) a form of nonpenetrative sex where the penis is rubbed between the thighs or the labia majora

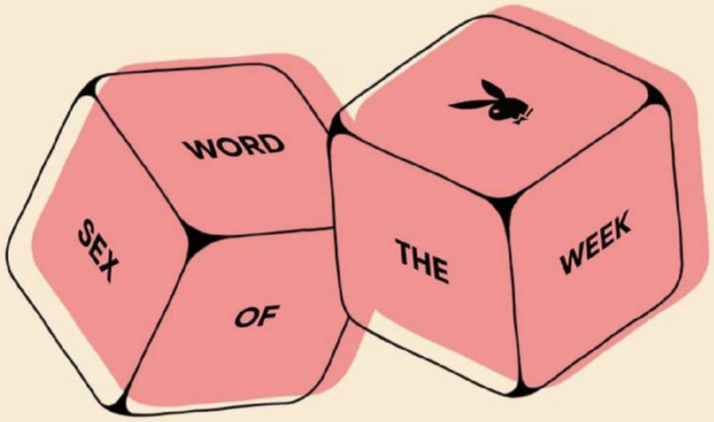
She placed their penis against her labia and began to rock back and forth rhythmically, knowing sumata always quickly led to a climax.

Slowly but surely, we're inching (ha) toward a society where sex isn't defined as a penis repeatedly going in and out of a vagina. It's for the greater pleasure of everyone, since decentering good ol' penis-in-vagina sex means our bedroom conversations can better include self-partnered people, nonhetero people, trans people, people with physical limitations and so on. One way of doing this is by taking a closer look at all the titillating forms of nonpenetrative sex out there.

So let's talk about getting in between the legs—no, literally, only between the legs. Sumata, more formally known as intercrural sex and more informally known as a pussy job, is the act of creating friction between the thighs or outer labia until climax is reached. Despite the act's many names and supposed origins, the specific term sumata is Japanese and is typically used in the context of brothels. Sumata was seen as a way for sex workers to skirt anti–sex work laws that forbade the exchange of sexual intercourse for money.

Sumata can be great for penis owners, since, with the help of lube, the repetitive gliding motion stimulates the head and the shaft. It can be amazing for vagina-havers as well, since the thrusting motion happens externally against the clitoris, with its 8,000 nerve endings.

For those wanting to practice safer sex or avoid unwanted pregnancy, this form of outercourse can provide stimulation with much less risk. So if you want to explore new sensations in new ways, work some sumata into your sex-positions Rolodex!



Shrimping

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

shrimping (*v*) the act of erotically licking or sucking on a partner's toes

Kara slowly moisturized her toes and feet as Joseph hungrily watched—eager for yet another shrimping session.

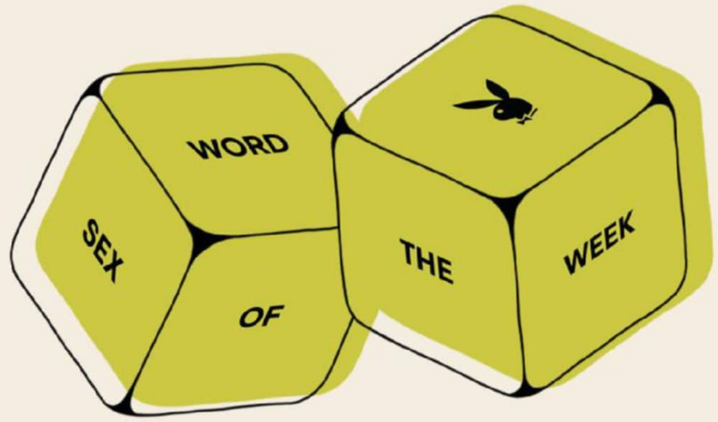
Let's talk about going down on someone. Nope, not that. Going all the way down on someone. Feet fetishes aren't anything new. There's an entire class of adult performers who have built careers on their cute feet and have given the phrase m"working on your feet all day" a way spicier meaning. In addition to poring over photos and videos, another part of foot worship is shrimping, which refers to sucking and licking someone's toes. And yes, the name gets its inspiration from the shape of the human toe.

The shrimper gets off on the submissive act of having someone's foot in their mouth, and the person being shrimped is aroused by the sensation of a tongue delicately moving between their toes. The skin on toes and feet is more sensitive than the rest of the body (especially for you ticklish people out there), and all those extra nerve endings can make the deed extremely pleasurable for the recipient. Everyone wins!

In terms of rhythm, shrimping can operate similarly to a blow job, starting out slow at the tips and working your way to the base of the toes, doing a swirling motion with your tongue. And one can't underestimate the usefulness of hands! Don't be afraid to start off with a sensual foot massage before really diving in.

Needless to say, make sure your feet are squeaky clean. Maybe even make bathing and scrubbing each other part of your pre-shrimping ritual.

Regardless of whether you make shrimping part of foreplay or the main event, there's no shame in the toe-sucking game.



Retifism

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

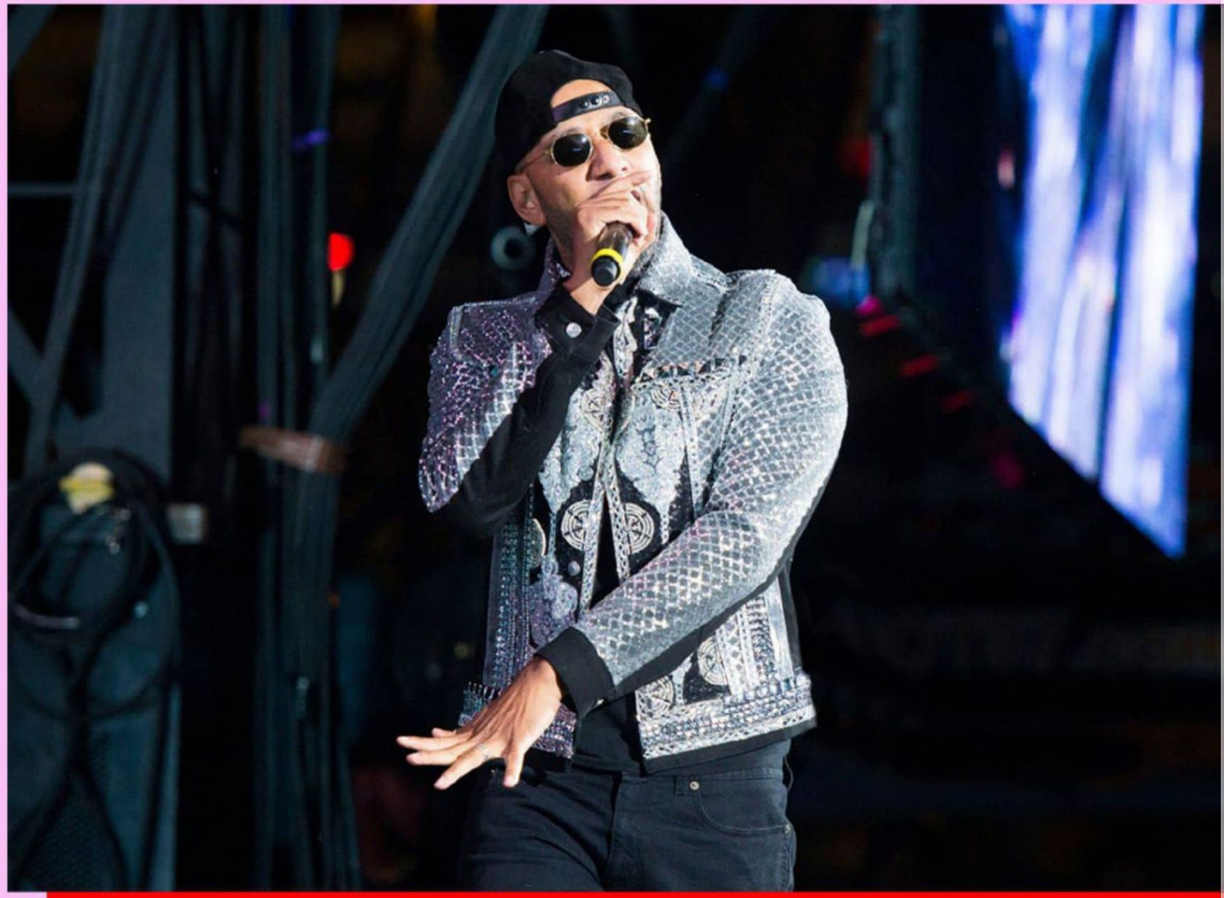
If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

retifism (*n*) a sexual attraction to footwear

Most of his friends assumed John's trips to the strip club were due to his love of the dancers, but actually his retifism had him focused on shiny, strappy high heels all night.

High heels: A source of pain and discomfort for some, a feat (see what I did there?) of footwear engineering for others—and a source of sexual obsession for a few. Since we did a deep dive on toe-sucking last week, why not introduce another element of foot worship? Retifism, aka shoe fetishism, is a wide-encompassing term, but it typically refers to the erotic interest in women's shoes, particularly heels. (But if you happen to get off to a pair of rugby cleats or some Air Force 1 beaters, then more power to you.) The term comes from 18th century French writer and libertine Nicolas Edme Restif de la Bretonne, who was known for his sexual preoccupation with shoes and eventually had his literature focusing on the subject removed from libraries.

High heels are already coded as sexy. The popular musical comedy Kinky Boots didn't come out of nowhere. From sex work to entertainment, the high heel has often served as a shorthand for female sexual dominance. Imagine the stiletto: The arch of a foot in a stiletto reminds one of the way feet curl during orgasm, and the towering six-inch heel reads as nothing but phallic. Not to mention the straps, ties and buckles trigger a certain BDSM sensibility. Retifism simply takes this cultural programming a step further and turns the shoe itself into the primary sex object instead of the person occupying it. So the next time you twitch at the sight of a pair of red-bottoms sashaying down the sidewalk, know you're in good company.



SOUL AND ENERGY

Timbaland and Swizz Beatz on Verzuz

A conversation with the mastermind producers on their streaming-battle sensation and why everyone from LeBron James to Kamala Harris is tuning in

BY **SOWMYA KRISHNAMURTHY**

Swizz Beatz and Timbaland don't remember exactly how they met. It might have been while Timbaland was working with Missy Elliott. Or maybe it was at an awards show. Swizz isn't sure—but he knows it was decades ago.

"When we first met I wasn't really, how would you put it, super sociable," he admits. "We used to always see each other in passing." Timbaland recalls their paths crossed while they were both working on tracks for Jay-Z, he on "Big Pimpin'" and Swizz on "Jigga My Nigga."

"It was probably at a studio," Timbaland says. "Back then, studio work was our life."

As two of hip-hop's most prolific producers, Swizz Beatz and Timbaland have helmed hits for the likes of Kanye West, Beyoncé, Aaliyah, DMX and, of course, Jay-Z, and have both more than earned their coveted "superproducer" status. They share rarefied air.

"It was always friendly competition," says Timbaland.

Laughs Swizz, "Very high competition."

It was from this simpatico relationship—and a message from a higher power—that Verzuz was born.

Perhaps the first cultural juggernaut of the music world to emerge from the pandemic, Verzuz is a streaming sensation. What began as a friendly tête-à-tête between the two producers—each going song for song against each other on Instagram Live during the nascent days of quarantine—has exploded into a showdown between veteran artists, songwriters and producers.

The format is straightforward: Each challenger selects a track to go up against the opponent's, and they go back and forth for 20 rounds. In early Verzuz bouts there was a fervor to crown a winner each time, but as the pandemic stretched on and the sociopolitical landscape shifted, the ethos evolved into more of a happy celebration of cultural excellence

Verzuz lineups have included Beenie Man vs. Bounty Killer, Jill Scott vs. Erykah Badu and Gladys Knight vs. Patti LaBelle. The inaugural Instagram Live battle took place in late March, with Swizz Beatz and Timbaland furiously trading tracks for more than 20,000 viewers. The audience increased exponentially from there. More than 500,000 tuned in for the July 22 "battle of the dogs" between DMX and Snoop—one of hip-hop's unsung friendships—and the audience for former R&B rivals Brandy and Monica was more than double that.

In just six months, Verzuz has become must-watch entertainment. The battles not only allow fans to relive classic discographies but also provide an intimate experience, a front-row seat to watch legends trade war stories and never-before-heard anecdotes.

But Verzuz's success hasn't come without growing pains. Technical difficulties plagued early shows; Nelly's wi-fi in his battle against Ludacris was so bad his stream fully froze at times. CNN went so far as to call the original Babyface and Teddy Riley battle a "complete fail" because of the audio problems. As a result, some artists refused to participate in Verzuz, worried it might hurt their image. Understanding the need to up the production value, Swizz Beatz and Timbaland forged a partnership with Apple Music in July. The deal, which allows them to retain full ownership of the brand, provides additional resources and expands Verzuz to Apple TV. Since then, productions have gone noticeably smoother.

Verzuz is the perfect medium for the moment. And it has created an unexpected return to appointment viewing, with megawatt names like Michelle Obama, Rihanna and LeBron James showing up in the audience alongside hundreds of thousands of other fans. Vice presidential nominee Kamala Harris even made a surprise cameo during the face-off between Brandy and Monica. For artists, the battles provide a revival in relevance and a surge in catalog streams—a happy consequence now known as "the Verzuz effect."

For the masterminds behind the idea, it's all still surreal. Timbaland and Swizz Beatz say they're floored by the runaway success of Verzuz—and a little overwhelmed by the plethora of calls and meetings that now take up their days. Calling in from Miami and the Middle East, respectively, the two producers spoke to Playboy about how a friendly rivalry birthed the pandemic's first pop culture phenomenon.

"I come up from battles. I wasn't even thinking digitally with Verzuz. Why would you want to watch online when you could just go to a show?"

PLAYBOY: The origin story of Verzuz goes back to 2018, when you had a battle during Hot 97's Summer Jam. Was the original idea that Verzuz would be a live event?

TIMBALAND: The goal was to get artists to do it live, to do it on tour, to make it with the people. We didn't have an idea of it being digital.

SWIZZ: I come up from battles. I wasn't even thinking digitally with Verzuz. Why would you want to watch online when you could just go to a show?

TIMBALAND: Now once you see it in the digital world, it makes total sense.

SWIZZ: Right? We wasn't even thinking like that; that just happened. Look at where we at now. It's still mind-blowing to me.

PLAYBOY: Did you actually go around and pitch the initial idea? Did anyone see the vision?

TIMBALAND: Nobody sees your vision, you know that. I think we all know that in life. If everybody sees your vision, it wouldn't push you to go forward. Of course nobody saw our vision.

SWIZZ: It's funny because I always keep my diary; I write my notes and my thoughts. I was flipping through it as I'm out here planning different things, putting them in the universe. And I looked back and I'm seeing the page that said 2018, and it had this whole layout of Verzuz. It had our tour, the cities we were going to go to. It had us versing our albums, it had who we was going to pick in different towns to come on stage to verse each other on our sets. It had merch. Looking back at that page, it was pretty crazy.

PLAYBOY: How did the pandemic cause you to change course?

TIMBALAND: The pandemic is bad, but it made me realize I was wasting time doing a lot of things that were unnecessary. Spending a lot of unnecessary money. When the world actually did halt [in March], I just went into meditation and prayer. I kept hearing a voice in me: "Technology, technology." And I'm just like, Okay, I know it's technology, but I need more answers. I'm praying, I'm thinking. I ran out to my studio and I called Swizz. I said, "You remember that idea? That vision, Verzuz? Let's just go now."

SWIZZ: He started posting beats on his Instagram and saying my name. "Swizz, what we doing?" He did it like three times. And then I put up a beat, and was like, "Tim, you know what we doing. We doing whatever you want to do. What we doing?" He did about three [beats], I did about three, then we got on the phone and he was like, "Man, we should just go on and do it. Let's just get on [Instagram] Live and just have some fun." An hour after that conversation, we was live for 20 or 30,000 people, and that was the birth of the digital side of Verzuz. The 2.0 version.

PLAYBOY: And that was a long battle.

SWIZZ: We was going for five hours. I was in my car, he was in his studio, and we just kept going. And we could've went for another five. That's how much music we have.

PLAYBOY: The evolution from the first split-screen Verzuz battles to today has been interesting. It was far less polished in the beginning, but when things didn't go as planned—Teddy Riley's internet connectivity issues, Sean Garrett's raucous

state—it made for memorable moments. Do you take those spontaneous moments in stride or are you striving for perfection?

SWIZZ: One thing we was running into was the quality. When Dr. Dre turned down Verzuz because of the quality, me and Tim had to sit back at the drawing board because we can never let that happen again. The Apple partnership is good because it came with them producing the show with us. Us still owning 100 percent of it, but them bringing some extra quality, not leaving it to the artists to produce the show.

TIMBALAND: I think Swizz is probably more perfectionist than I am. But we learned as we went along. Now we're doing those steps. Now we understand the audience. You got to find out through trial and error.

SWIZZ: I'm a Virgo, so I'm definitely a perfectionist. Not everybody's savvy like that. People don't really know what level their internet's at. They just want to show up and do they thing. I feel a couple of artists got slighted in battles because they didn't take their technology seriously or take the sound-checking seriously. The fact that we were able to take that off the artists' table with our partnership with Apple, we think it's a super plus. We got two big trucks outside, the wi-fi, real cameras and everything like that. It's what it's supposed to be. These artists should be shown in the best light; it still should feel organic.

"A couple of artists got slighted in battles because they didn't take their technology or the sound-checking seriously."

PLAYBOY: You mentioned Dr. Dre was wary of doing Verzuz for quality reasons. Babyface was initially hesitant as well. Can you talk a little bit about those calls with artists?

SWIZZ: Yeah, the phone calls don't stop. It's super daily. And you'd be surprised how hesitant a lot of artists are when a lot of them haven't been on the big stage like that in a long time, and they don't really know what the fans are going to think. We spend a lot of time giving the artist confidence that they are going to go to the next level.

PLAYBOY: How do you decide the matchups? In instances like Brandy vs. Monica, the rivalry was well established. But other battles were a pleasant surprise, like DMX vs. Snoop Dogg.

SWIZZ: A lot of people look at the names, but they don't look at the music. And me and Tim got to curate the music. You could put two names that sound good, but what does it sound like? Do they have the songs? I'm a DJ first, I come from being a DJ, so I know what goes together. That's like a gift. And Tim knows as well. Right now, we got one that's on the table that sounded cool in the beginning, but when we start listening to the songs and the energy, we're like, "Man, we got to tell them we can't do that."

PLAYBOY: Recent battles feel like less of a competition and more of a celebration between artists sharing backstories and career milestones.

TIMBALAND: I tell artists, "Come on you guys, celebrate. The world wants to see you celebrating." You've got to understand Gladys Knight took a tour bus to Philly to go celebrate [with Patti LaBelle for Verzuz]. Think about the love, right? She called me, she said, "I love what y'all are doing, baby. I want to be a part of this."

SWIZZ: Music is the biggest currency for your soul, and that's why it's important for us to curate that right, and to give the people certain things at certain times. We also curate the energy.

PLAYBOY: Who's on your wish list for future battles?

SWIZZ: As a hip-hop fanatic, I definitely want to see Big Daddy Kane versus Rakim.

PLAYBOY: I would love to see Usher vs. Justin Timberlake.

SWIZZ: Well, that's the one that we've been fighting for. They both have that time period, they both around the same age, they both have the same rankings. Also, I definitely want to see Anita Baker and Sade.

PLAYBOY: Both of you already have illustrious careers in hip-hop. What does Verzuz mean to you in the grand scheme?

TIMBALAND: I know a lot of times I took things for granted, took for granted the gifts that God gave me. And this is a precious dream of both of ours. For me, I like to just be thankful.

SWIZZ: We have to be smart, have to have smart people around that's making these real amazing decisions with us, so that's what we're doing. We're building up our team. This is just the start. We didn't even launch Verzuz global yet, we didn't even launch so many different things.

TIMBALAND: I'm not trying to be chasing partners, millions. I did that. This is different. This is being a CEO of a company and letting the brand be bigger than you. You don't see me and Swizz jumping out. We're not trying to be the face of Verzuz. Verzuz is bigger than us.

SWIZZ: The planes are just taking off the runway. We're nowhere near our destination yet. We're having fun, and we're keeping it simple. But the sky is not the limit, it's just a view.

The Enchanting

PLAYMATE

Kimmy Kimm

Model **@kimmykimmreels**

Photographer **Evan Richardson | @evan.richardson.photography**
MUA **Johnna J Perez | @johnnajmakeup**
Hair **Ashley Francisco | @ashleythehmua**
PR Company **Centerfold Features**

PLAYMATE

PLAYMATE

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Such an absolute honour to have you! Thank you so much! The honor is mine! This has been a dream.

How do you like to begin your day? I like to start my days slow! Sometimes with stretching and some hot green tea! Other times, just laying in bed.

What's the most exciting hobby or interest you've pursued recently, and how did you get into it? Before this last year, I hadn't ever taken dance classes as an adult, but I've been LOVING it as of lately! TikTok inspired me, funnily enough.

If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would your ideal day look like? My ideal day would be on a beach in Jamaica, being served fresh mango... again, hahah.

What's a project or goal you're currently working on that you're really excited about? I'm always excited to make content! I've been having a lot of fun making POV videos lately, and my latest is with Dredd.

What's the most memorable date you've ever been on, and what made it stand out? My most memorable date was probably a concert! I had wanted to see the opener for a long time! My date had no idea who he even was.

Are there any qualities or traits you find particularly attractive in a partner? What do you value the most? Kindness is number one for me. I feel like you can tell if someone has kind eyes or a genuine smile.

Who has been your biggest inspiration or role model in your personal or professional life? My biggest inspiration comes from seeing others be creative! I'm always scrolling social media, amazed.

What do you enjoy most about your hobbies or interests outside of work? I've loved how good dance has been for my mind and my body! Remembering choreography is a skill I haven't mastered yet.

How do you find a balance between your personal life and your career? I'm actually probably still working on finding a good balance.

How do you stay motivated and overcome challenges in your work? I stay motivated by watching others' creativity! I'm lucky to get advice from others who have been around for much longer.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? You can find me at OnlyKimmy.com I'm on my websites every day

PLAYMATE

Playboy Interview

Keanu Reeves

A candid conversation about voting, technology and paparazzi overreach with the notoriously reclusive Matrix star

INTERVIEW BY **MICHAEL FLEMING** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DJACK GUY**

Keanu Reeves is possibly Hollywood's most elusive megastar, an actor who has managed to remain mysterious on the big screen and even more so in real life. But keeping his fans and critics confused and off-guard has paid off handsomely. Reeves, 41, has packed movie theaters by playing an improbable range of characters in some of the most unforgettable films of the past two decades.

Take, for example, the legendary Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure, a movie m"just stupid enough to be endearing," as one reviewer put it. The role of Ted could easily have pigeonholed Reeves if the actor had not gone on to appear in parts as varied as a Shakespeare-quoting bisexual hustler in My Own Private Idaho (Vincent Canby called Reeves's performance m"very fine") and a stoic cop in the highly caffeinated Speed, in which he uttered such lines as m"Harry, there's enough C-4 on this thing to put a hole in the world!"

Then, of course, there is The Matrix and its sequels, in which Reeves's kung fu and slow-motion bullet dodging make Bruce Lee seem slothful. The three Matrix movies, released in 1999 and 2003, earned upward of $1.6 billion worldwide. Of sci-fi films, only the Star Wars series has made more. Reeves, who shared in the trilogy's profits, took home more than $150 million.

Along the way, there were flops—forgettable (and forgotten) movies such as Feeling Minnesota, Chain Reaction and Sweet November—but there were far more hits, from Much Ado About Nothing, River's Edge and Little Buddha to Something's Gotta Give and Constantine.

Reeves was born in Beirut to an English mother and a father who is part Chinese and part Hawaiian; Reeves's unusual first name is Hawaiian for a"cool breeze over the mountains." His parents split when Reeves was young, and he and his sisters were raised by their mother, mostly in Toronto, where he attended four high schools. He was a skilled ice-hockey goalie, nicknamed the Wall, who dreamed of a pro career—that is, until he discovered acting. He dropped out of school when he was 17 and worked steadily as an actor in Canada before moving to Hollywood at the age of 20.

At a time when his fellow stars are acting out in public as well as on film—Tom Cruise jumping up and down on Oprah's couch, Russell Crowe tossing a telephone across a hotel lobby—Reeves is low-key and silent. His characters say relatively little on-screen, and he says even less off. He has continually declined to comment on some of the most dramatic events in his life, including the tragedy that befell him and his girlfriend Jennifer Syme when their baby was stillborn weeks before its due date in 1999 and Syme's death in a car accident, in 2001. Because of his reluctance to expose his personal life, Reeves remains strangely unknown for such a major star. His interviews are rare, and a lengthy one such as this is almost nonexistent. In addition Reeves avoids the paparazzi, stays out of the limelight and often refuses to answer interviewers' questions at all. That hasn't stopped the rumor mill, however; sketchy blog reports have alleged romances with everyone from Lindsay Lohan to Diane Keaton, his costar in Something's Gotta Give. When asked about her supposed affair with Reeves, Keaton responded "with a disbelieving yelp," according to The New York Times.

One of Reeves's upcoming movies is A Scanner Darkly, based on a futuristic tale by author Philip K. Dick; the movie was shot in live action and then animated. Reeves plays a narcotics officer investigating his own alter ego, a drug-abusing dealer of a dangerous new hallucinogen. "Keanu threw himself into the role," says director Richard Linklater, whose movies include Dazed and Confused and The School of Rock. "There is a beautiful innocence about him, a direct line of empathy that the audience picks up. He feels things deeply and conveys them without saying anything or even displaying them in his face. I think when he looks in the mirror he doesn't see a leading man or even a good-looking guy. At different times he may see a hobo or a guy in an alley, snuffling through life with no food in his refrigerator." Reeves is also reuniting with Sandra Bullock, his bus-driver companion in Speed, for The Lake House.

Playboy sent writer Michael Fleming, who most recently interviewed Jamie Foxx and the Rock, to meet with Reeves. His report: "When he arrived at Le Meridien hotel in Los Angeles, Reeves had longish hair and a substantial black beard ringing his boyish face. It almost seemed as if the growth were intended to give him something to hide behind. He wore a black blazer and gray scarf, never taking either off as we chatted for an afternoon. "Reeves's intelligence may show through in his choice of roles and his measured performances, but boy, is he guarded. He shields his private life more than any movie star I've interviewed. I waited for him to open up, but whenever it got personal, he became uncomfortable and quiet. If not loquacious, he was at least gracious and polite—even, I noticed, fanning the smoke from his numerous cigarettes away from me."

PLAYBOY: In your new movie, A Scanner Darkly, you return to the genre of The Matrix, science fiction, this time with a hallucinogenic animation overlay. Are you a sci-fi, techno-obsessed, geeky kind of guy?

REEVES: Me? I don't even have a computer.

PLAYBOY: Neo from The Matrix has no computer?

REEVES: That's right. It always made [Matrix directors] Larry and Andy Wachowski laugh.

PLAYBOY: How have you avoided owning a computer in 2006?

REEVES: I'm more interested in people than technology. I'm not a gearhead.

PLAYBOY: How about a BlackBerry? Can you be a Hollywood celebrity without one?

REEVES: Yes. With all technology, I am interested in the ideas, what it means sociologically. I love reading about inventions, knowing why and how people use them—the internet and the rest—but I'm far more fascinated by the human aspects. As far as I can tell, devices meant to save you time and help you communicate actually take away time and give you an excuse not to communicate. People like e-mail because they don't have to answer it. You want to talk to people, but you get less time to do it. I prefer letters. I like to write them.

PLAYBOY: In longhand?

REEVES: On a typewriter.

PLAYBOY: Do you use Wite-Out for your mistakes?

REEVES: Nah. I put Xs through mistakes. That's part of the charm.

PLAYBOY: If Star Wars is the standard, where does the Matrix trilogy rank in the pantheon of science-fiction franchises? Financially, it's number two.

REEVES: I would say we're the new number one. Everyone has their own ranking, but The Matrix is definitely my favorite. I still get protective about it. I got so mad when The Matrix wasn't nominated for an Academy Award last time.

PLAYBOY: An Academy Award for——

REEVES: At least for the special effects. Are you fucking kidding me? Are you fucking insane?

PLAYBOY: The first Matrix movie came out right before the first Star Wars prequel. By comparison The Matrix was reviewed as fresh and cutting-edge. It developed a cult following and inspired fashion trends, and the entire series took in more than $1.5 billion. When you first read the script, did you imagine it would become such a sensation?

REEVES: I didn't, though I saw a great script and a great story. The ideas pushed the envelope in science fiction. I had never heard of anything like The Matrix before. I hadn't seen any of those ideas before—a guy living in a dream. They were going to slow down the action scenes, and there was this kung fu stuff. I loved all that. I knew it was going to be hard work—I recognized the effort it would take—but it excited me.

PLAYBOY: When you look back, do you remember the effort or the movies' success?

REEVES: It was very exciting to work on those films. I feel very grateful for how my life changed because of them—what I went through, the people I met. Neo has a relationship to humans, to machines and to energy itself. What does he ask for? Peace. I think that's one of the best messages we can strive for. I have strong feelings about that message. That part of it helped me get through the experience.

PLAYBOY: Reportedly, you and numerous co-stars were injured while making those movies. How badly were you banged up?

REEVES: My knees aren't the same. They're just not. I have to get them scoped.

PLAYBOY: Because of the kung fu scenes?

REEVES: Yeah, though it was just movie kung fu, not the real stuff. We hit each other only a couple of times, so it wasn't that bad.

But people broke things. Carrie-Anne Moss hurt her leg, and Hugo Weaving had to have a hole drilled into his hip to drain some fluid. I was taking ice baths and massages and trying not to cry at

night. But would I do it again? Absolutely.

I'm still kind of tired from it, though. I'm still recovering. Five or six months ago I remember saying to a friend that I finally felt as if I'd processed the first Matrix.

PLAYBOY: Five months ago? That film came out in 1999.

REEVES: Yeah, but I'm a sensitive guy. The first shoot was eight months, and the second was 22 months. My stunt double told me I did more wire work than 90 percent of the stuntmen in the business.

PLAYBOY: After shoots like those, do you stay in touch with the directors and cast?

REEVES: Yes. I saw Laurence Fishburne just the other day. I bought him some artwork for his new house. I haven't seen Carrie-Anne for a while. I saw Hugo at a film festival a few months back. All the people we're speaking about are my friends. If I got married, they'd all be invited.

PLAYBOY: When it finally shuts down, how do you get an intensive shoot like The Matrix out of your system? Do you get lost for three weeks?

REEVES: Three weeks? Is that all I get? Normally when I finish work, I'm very tired but also restless. I look to reconnect with friends. I ride my bike.

PLAYBOY: Where?

REEVES: I mainly just ride around town, seeking sunsets and the ocean. I ride around the canyons or Malibu.

PLAYBOY: You've had several notable accidents. Have your injuries affected your riding?

REEVES: I still ride every day, pretty much.

PLAYBOY: Which is your favorite bike?

REEVES: A 1974 Norton Commando 850. It's an English sport touring twin. Comfortable. You can go up to San Francisco in a jump.

PLAYBOY: One of your well-publicized spills temporarily messed up your face pretty well. Do you wear a helmet now?

REEVES: It's the law, so now I do, except when I'm in places that have no helmet laws.

PLAYBOY: A lot is riding on you when you star in a film. Are you contractually restricted from riding motorcycles when you're shooting a movie?

REEVES: Sometimes I have to state my position, to say whether I will or won't ride.

PLAYBOY: You have said you like going on what you call the devil ride. What is it?

REEVES: There are a couple of spots on Mulholland Drive in the Hollywood Hills, where, if there's a good moon out, you can coast all the way down toward the ocean. You shut off your lights and go. It's very quiet. You're guided by the moonlight. It's very pleasant. It's not like I'm howling at the moon, but it's quiet, and you can hear and feel the breeze. There is a certain aspect to riding. You're getting away and enjoying nature and riding. You can't daydream when you ride. You have to be here now.

PLAYBOY: Is the thrill, as well as the danger, part of the attraction?

REEVES: Well, I'm not looking to get into any mishaps.

PLAYBOY: What caused your accidents?

REEVES: I've had a few of them. I crashed a few times. Once a car pulled a U-turn from a parking space in front of me into my lane. The driver couldn't see me coming, and I couldn't get out of the way. That one is responsible for my fake teeth—my teeth replacements.

PLAYBOY: How badly were you hurt?

REEVES: I sheared some skin off my right shin. I broke my ankle and a couple of teeth. Not so bad.

PLAYBOY: Easy for you to say. And you have a scar on your abdomen. From what?

REEVES: That was from running into the hillside. I took a turn a little too fast and just ran out of road.

PLAYBOY: Do these accidents ever make you consider quitting?

REEVES: No. After an accident I just vow to go a little slower.

PLAYBOY: How quickly do you get back on the bike afterward?

REEVES: As soon as I heal up.

PLAYBOY: In addition to riding, do you work out?

REEVES: I guess it depends on the day.

PLAYBOY: Do you try to stay in shape? What regimen do you have?

REEVES: Eat right, get plenty of rest.

PLAYBOY: Do you go to the gym? Do any Pilates?

REEVES: Nah. I'm an old-fashioned guy. I lift some, and I run.

PLAYBOY: How about fashion trends? What do your long hair and beard say about you? Would you define your look as more slacker or fashion plate?

"People like e-mail because they don't have to answer it. I don't even have a computer."

REEVES: I wouldn't describe myself as a slacker or a fashion plate. I visit both of those worlds. I like to get dressed up once in a while.

PLAYBOY: Do you wear a character around after the workday is over?

REEVES: I tend to bring it home until I feel I know the guy I'm playing. If I'm doing an accent, I may answer the phone in the accent. When I worked on Sam Raimi's The Gift, I was going to bars and hanging out, jumping into the truck and wearing thick clothes. I enjoy that process of immersing myself in a character.

PLAYBOY: How much of a stretch was it to play a wife beater in The Gift? He was a brutal guy. Besides the accent and clothes, did you bring him home?

REEVES: I said no a lot more than I usually do. I wasn't as polite as I usually am.

PLAYBOY: Hilary Swank played your wife and was the recipient of your brutality. How did it feel to summon that rage and bully a woman?

REEVES: A part of me was afraid of my violent side. Once Hilary and I were improvising in a trailer. I just kept saying, g"You're lying. You're lying. You're lying." We were rehearsing this argument, and Sam said, "Every time you say, g'You're lying,' instead of saying it, just hit her." Hilary was like, "No, Donnie, I wasn't " [makes slapping noise] m"Donnie, I wasn't " [slaps] Sam was like, m"Grab her face." This went on until finally I pushed her up against the wall and started taking her pants off. I stopped, but it was very scary. It was like, "Oh, shit. Okay. Now I get it. I get it." It was very frightening.

PLAYBOY: Did it help Swank prepare for her role in Million Dollar Baby?

REEVES: [*Laughs*] Yeah. And by the way, I also learned a bit of… well, that some of the ladies don't mind it, so…. Nah, that's awful to say.

PLAYBOY: In one of your next movies you're playing Hollywood mobster Johnny Stompanato. Catherine Zeta-Jones plays his girlfriend Lana Turner. Stompanato was a small-time L.A. gangster with

a legendary temper. Turner's daughter, Cheryl, stabbed him to death to save her mother. Was he similar to the character in The Gift?

REEVES: I found it interesting that Stompanato had this temper but that he was trying to control and civilize it. He didn't want to be a thug. He didn't want to be Mickey Cohen's tough guy. I liked the struggle of a violent guy who tries to change his nature.

PLAYBOY: By the time of The Gift, you had become one of the highest-paid actors in Hollywood. It has been reported that you made more than $150 million on the three Matrix films—one of the more lucrative movie-star paydays in history. Before that you had a reputation for living a modest existence. Does such a windfall dramatically change the way you live?

REEVES: Yes. It definitely changed the way I can live. Absolutely.

PLAYBOY: But has it? How?

REEVES: I can buy my mom a house, which is great. Then I can do the renovation. And yes, I can expand my level of philanthropy. A lot of things in my life extended out. How I am personally isn't really affected by it, but my life is. I'm still pretty sparing, though. I haven't gone nuts. I haven't changed much of my lifestyle. No, I don't have a jet.

PLAYBOY: After having long been content to live in hotels, you bought a house. As you get older is it more important to put down roots?

REEVES: That's how I would put it. I guess I was looking for something more. Yeah, and this is after living in the Chateau Marmont for four years in the 1990s.

PLAYBOY: What's the best thing about living in a hotel for four years?

REEVES: Room service. Overall it was good fun, but the fun has to stop at some point. It was time to check out. Now it's nice to have a home.

PLAYBOY: Do you make your own bed?

REEVES: I do. It's good to make your own bed and do your own dishes.

"Robert De Niro once spoke about the loss of his privacy, how he missed the ability to be a voyeur, to look at other people. As an actor, you don't want to lose that."

PLAYBOY: Did you decorate your house yourself?

REEVES: Yes. It's kind of modern. Modern comfy, if that's possible.

PLAYBOY: How else has your life changed since The Matrix? Can you go out and be anonymous, or is that time gone?

REEVES: It's important to do it still. Robert De Niro once spoke about the loss of his privacy, how he missed the ability to be a voyeur, to look at other people. As an actor, you don't want to lose that. I can still walk around, do what I need to and not be bothered much.

PLAYBOY: How does it feel when strangers come up and act as if they know you?

REEVES: It's generally nice if people want to say hi. I can move around the world pretty freely. No one freaks out.

PLAYBOY: Can you still go to the mall—anywhere you want?

REEVES: Yeah, absolutely. I went to the movies the other night. It was fine. I got recognized a couple of times, but it's no big deal. You never get supercomfortable with that, but in my experience it's usually pretty much g"Hi" and "Can you sign this?" which is fine.

PLAYBOY: After three Matrix films, you did Constantine and Thumbsucker, an art-house film about a guy with an oral fixation. Upcoming you have The Lake House, with Sandra Bullock, and A Scanner Darkly—four utterly different types of movies. After the second Bill & Ted's, you played a bisexual hustler in My Own Private Idaho. Are you intentionally trying to mix it up? Is one film a reaction to the one that preceded it?

REEVES: One film isn't a reaction to the last as much as it is just finding something I'm interested in. At the same time, I don't want to become g"that guy" or be known for any one thing. I'd like to be able to do any kind of role in any kind of film.

PLAYBOY: Was it difficult for you to shake the perception of being an airhead from Bill & Ted's? Did it make it harder to get the next job?

REEVES: It wasn't as hard for me to shake the perception as it seemed to be for other people. [Laughs] I must have done a good job, because some people thought that was who I was.

PLAYBOY: Were you in high demand for roles that required an air-guitar solo?

REEVES: I never got that. People in the business never seemed to pigeonhole me because of the role, though sometimes I'd get it critically and socially.

PLAYBOY: Now critics finally seem to appreciate your work more than at any other time. Have you gotten better, or have they caught on?

REEVES: [*Groans*] Have I gotten better, or have they caught on? I feel like I've grown in my craft. I plan to continue that. In terms of catching on, I don't really know. Whatever.

PLAYBOY: You received good reviews for My Own Private Idaho. Your on-screen relationship with River Phoenix is as intimate and daring as the relationship in Brokeback Mountain. What was the reaction to that movie?

REEVES: My Own Private Idaho was well received, but the reaction had a lot to do with the film's structure. In the middle you have Shakespeare. You have street kids, homosexuality, father-son stuff. There is no straight, direct dramatic narrative.

PLAYBOY: If it had come out today, would it be embraced like Brokeback Mountain? Is there more openness to the depiction of homosexual and bisexual relationships now than when My Own Private Idaho came out in 1991?

REEVES: I think so. Brokeback Mountain has been put on a platform as a love story. Is it a more open world because it's a story about love between two men? Well, we've got gay marriage now. So I guess, yes. Idaho still holds up, by the way. I saw it recently. It has aged well.

PLAYBOY: And you? Are there qualities in your acting now that you're 40 that weren't there when you were 20 or even 30?

REEVES: I don't know. I don't look at myself like that. I just look forward to what happens next.

PLAYBOY: Does it worry you to get older in a business that reveres youth?

REEVES: No, I don't have that worry. I look at it differently. I look at Macbeth and wonder, Do I have the stature yet? Do I look too young? That's one I'd like to do. I want to be able to do it and feel like I know what I'm talking about. I just hope I don't have to age too hard to earn it.

PLAYBOY: You have said you stank in Francis Ford Coppola's Dracula. What was wrong with your performance?

REEVES: When I went into the picture, I had done a lot of work—three films in a year. I was psychically beat-up, fragile and not so confident. Actually, I saw that film again about a year ago, and it was okay. As arch as all the other performances were, mine was suitable.

PLAYBOY: Speed made you a bankable leading man. Did you sense in advance that it would?

REEVES: No. What I saw in the script was an action film and a chance to humanize the action hero. At the time, that type of role was changing after Bruce Willis did Die Hard. My performance was in the spirit of the change to more character-based interpretations of the action hero.

PLAYBOY: Why did you turn down Speed 2? In retrospect it was a good decision, but the original Speed was a blockbuster.

REEVES: Aw, this is all ancient history.

PLAYBOY: But it's not a painful memory?

REEVES: [*Laughs*] Good ancient history.

PLAYBOY: Why did you say no?

REEVES: At the time, I didn't feel the script and story were things that needed to be made.

PLAYBOY: Because a boat moving through water doesn't visually convey the danger of a speeding bus?

REEVES: That was one of my major points. [*Laughs*] My idea was to have my character traveling through the whole film, trying to propose to Sandra with all these obstacles getting in the way. That would have been charming. But also, when the film came around, I wasn't ready to go run and jump. I was in the middle of finishing Chain Reaction. I just didn't feel like running and jumping anymore. So I played Hamlet, and that was fine.

"No one wants their private life intruded upon by long-lens cameras and flashbulbs."

PLAYBOY: Years later why did you agree to make Something's Gotta Give? It had all the markings of a corny chick flick, though it became a hit and revived the genre of smart adult films.

REEVES: I thought it was a great story, incredibly well written by director Nancy Meyers. And I got the chance to work with Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton. I liked the humanity of my character, that he was a heart doctor in a story about matters of the heart. There was a nice dignity to him, so I didn't mind not getting the girl.

PLAYBOY: Were you nervous working with Nicholson? Were you more nervous working with him than with other iconic co-stars?

REEVES: I was probably most nervous at a rehearsal of The Devil's Advocate with Al Pacino. It was in a studio loft in Manhattan, where we sat on a couple of chairs that were substituting for a subway bench. It was the first time I got to roll up my sleeves with a master. Yeah, I was nervous. But Pacino is a very generous actor, a lovely man. That got me past it. This was my opportunity, as Laurence Fishburne always says, to swing.

PLAYBOY: To swing?

REEVES: You know, g"Let's swing, man. Let's go. Let's hit it out of the park."

PLAYBOY: You left high school to act. Was it a difficult decision?

REEVES: No, because I'd made the decision to act before I went to high school.

PLAYBOY: Was your mother worried about your quitting school?

REEVES: No, she was very supportive. No one tried to hold me back.

PLAYBOY: While it lasted, were you a good student?

REEVES: I was okay. I went to four high schools in five years. I went to one right after grade school for two years. Then I went to a performing-arts high school for a year. I got kicked out and went to a Catholic boys' high school to play hockey. That's where I did my first play. After that I went to a free school so I could work while getting my education. Then I dropped out.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any misgivings about not finishing high school and following the traditional path to college?

REEVES: No, because I'd started working as an actor. That's what I wanted to do.

PLAYBOY: When did you initially go to Hollywood to act?

REEVES: I was 20. I got a green card, got in my old car and drove across the border from Canada. I stayed half a year with my stepfather, who was a writer and director. He let me stay in his guest bedroom because I didn't know anybody out here. Then I made some friends, and I got an apartment and a roommate.

PLAYBOY: Were you at all homesick?

REEVES: Not at all. I was so ready to leave. I'd moved out of the house when I was 17 or 18.

PLAYBOY: How long did it take you to get established? Were there setbacks?

REEVES: I had the courage of youth. I had done a movie of the week in Canada. By the time I arrived in L.A., I had a manager and an agent. I came out with my head shots and went to auditions. After eight months of hearing no, I got my first break in a TV movie.

PLAYBOY: Now, after being in L.A. for 20 years, are you cynical about Hollywood and the movie business?

REEVES: Absolutely not. Hopefully I never will be.

PLAYBOY: There's probably not much ice hockey in Hollywood, yet you were an ice-hockey goalie in high school. Do you still play?

REEVES: I played five or six years ago, when my knees were better. I played a lot of hockey. I played in some under-30 and then over-30 leagues in L.A. I got awards for best goalie and best goals against. One year I got a trophy.

PLAYBOY: Your nickname when you played in high school, the Wall, suggests you were a force to be reckoned with. Did you ever aspire to play pro hockey?

REEVES: When I was 17, I was on the edge. I had a tryout for a major junior A team, which I didn't go to because I did a play instead.

PLAYBOY: After The Matrix, motorcycle accidents and ice hockey, how bad are your knees?

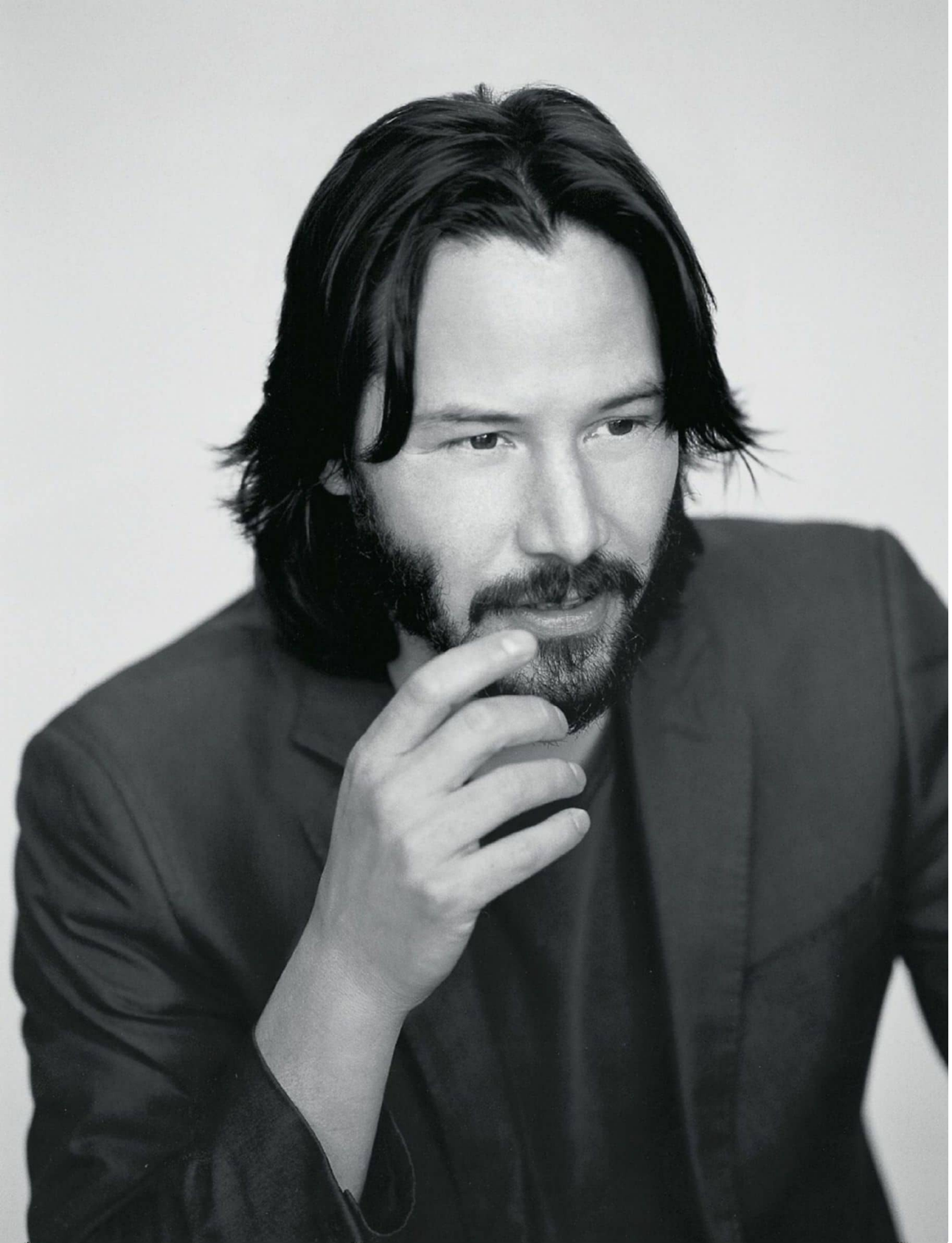
REEVES: Now it's hard for me even to play. My knees will get swollen. And then there was the neck surgery.

PLAYBOY: For what?

REEVES: I just had two cervical discs removed, but I'm still going to play some hockey. I'd like to get back in the net.

PLAYBOY: Tabloids track most stars' every step. They report rumors, but you generally seem to exist outside their glare. How have you managed that?

REEVES: I lead a very quiet life. I don't get out much. It's kind of sad, but—ah, well.



PLAYBOY: How troubling are the tabloids and paparazzi?
REEVES: No one wants their private life intruded upon by long-lens cameras and flashbulbs. It's more prevalent in Hollywood than it used to be. There are more photos of people going to eat and coming out of clubs. It's unavoidable.
PLAYBOY: Most stars engage lawyers to deny stories and threaten lawsuits as soon as a tabloid publishes something scurrilous. When unfounded reports surfaced that you'd married David Geffen, did you feel the need to defend yourself and refute them?
REEVES: No. When you say defend, in that case it comes down to making a judgment about being gay or not. I try not to live my life by what other people say.
PLAYBOY: Did the report about Geffen make you angry?
REEVES: No, man. To me, it's just bullshit. Like I said, rumors, all that kind of stuff. It's like, whatever.
PLAYBOY: Do you read the tabloids? Do you understand the appeal?
REEVES: People were gossiping about what the king and queen were doing way back when. It's just human nature. We like talking about other people.
PLAYBOY: Do you get drawn in?
REEVES: I get inoculated every year, so I don't.
PLAYBOY: Are you forgiving of the press?
REEVES: I don't think it has the right to peer over the fence or stalk me. It doesn't have a right to my private life.
PLAYBOY: Do you imagine using your celebrity to push politics the way Bono does?
REEVES: I don't have it in me. He's a remarkable man and a remarkable performer. I don't have that kind of scale in me, but I am involved in foundations.
PLAYBOY: Could you see yourself ever publicly backing a political candidate?
REEVES: I like to do things quietly. That's my style. For now.
PLAYBOY: George Clooney has made a series of political movies—Syriana and Good Night, and Good Luck. Do you ever consider making movies that would push your politics?
REEVES: It's not to my taste. It's admirable and important but not my style right now. My life now is smaller-scale. I get involved in certain philanthropic entities, but I like to go the private way.
PLAYBOY: Can you vote in the United States?
REEVES: No, I can't. I'm still a Canadian citizen.
PLAYBOY: Do you vote there?
REEVES: I don't participate in Canada, either. I guess one can say that, beyond social and human politics, I'm not a political person. I haven't voted. This is something I'd actually like to change.
PLAYBOY: Do you want to vote here?
REEVES: Yeah, and become a U.S. citizen. I realize I want to participate in different ways than I have been able to.
PLAYBOY: According to press reports, you never had a relationship with your father. Is he in your life now?
REEVES: No.
PLAYBOY: Do you know where he lives?
REEVES: In Hawaii.
PLAYBOY: Might you try to establish a relationship with him?
REEVES: I don't know. I just don't know.
PLAYBOY: Are you close with your mother and the rest of your family? Where are they?
REEVES: I have a sister in Italy and one in Seattle. My mother lives here. My family is pretty close. We see each other on holidays, whenever we can.
PLAYBOY: Along with acting, you apparently enjoy rock and roll. Do you still play bass in a rock band?
REEVES: No, I don't. I stopped about eight months ago. The band wanted to go on tour and make records, as opposed to just playing when we could. I felt like I was in their way. I stepped aside.
PLAYBOY: The band got much of its attention—and a record deal—primarily because you were in it.
REEVES: Yeah, but we hard-earned that after, like, seven years.
PLAYBOY: While your fame helped in some ways, did it also put pressure on the band?
REEVES: In the beginning, yeah. But if you're going to play music, shut up and play. If you don't want it to happen, stay home. Still, sometimes it was uncomfortable. We were a new band, and 3,000 people were coming out to see us play.
PLAYBOY: Where do you feel more naked: playing a new song live or opening in a play?
REEVES: Both sound pretty good. I like that excitement. I'm most comfortable onstage performing. When I'm acting onstage, I feel very much at home, more so than I do when performing music.

"I lead a very quiet life. I don't get out much. It's kind of sad, but—ah, well."

PLAYBOY: What gave you a bigger rush, opening for Bon Jovi, seeing The Matrix for the first time or being onstage in a play?
REEVES: Opening night onstage, but opening for Bon Jovi was fun. That was one of our first big concerts. Being amplified in the Forum is pretty awesome. The drums are like, boom! The bass. You feel the whole place moving. There's so much sound coming out, your pants are vibrating.
PLAYBOY: Is there more camaraderie between bandmates on the road or between cast members on location?
REEVES: They rival each other. You probably learn more about the personal foibles of the band on the road in a van or bus. You learn what everybody looks like at four a.m. The musician's life is a little more of the pirate's.
PLAYBOY: Will you play in another band?
REEVES: No.
PLAYBOY: Because you know you aren't likely to achieve in music what you have as an actor?
REEVES: No, it's not about that. I enjoyed the creative process. I loved playing shows and making music. There's nothing like writing a song for the first time and having a band come together and play it and then playing it live.
PLAYBOY: Then why did you quit the band?
REEVES: I'm 41 years old. I did the band for about nine years—long enough. It's just about finding time. I have too much else to do.
PLAYBOY: As you think about the future, do you see yourself sitting around the house, with a bunch of kids running around and a gut? George Clooney, a terminal bachelor, says it'll never happen for him. But he has a pot-bellied pig.
REEVES: Well, that goes to show you. We all need surrogates. It's nature. It's Darwin calling. What is it? g"Nature is railing a siren song, and not to answer is not to belong. The world must be peopled." Yeah, that impulse is definitely alive and well in me. Yeah. A gut and some kids? Why not?

LIVING THE DREAM

Cristal

Photography by **Mike Cohen | @mikecohenphotos**
MUA **Stephanie Emma | @stephanieemmamakeup**

Model **@cristalplayboy_official**

Hi Cristal, such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy. Tell us about the moment you found out you would be featured in the magazine. What was your initial reaction? Thank you for the invitation and this amazing experience. It's a real honor to be on the cover of Playboy South Africa again. It's a real gift from God and a blessing. I thank all my fans because thanks to you I'm here. I never dreamt that one day I would be in Playboy; it's a blessing. It's like a fairy tale, how an ordinary girl from a small town in Poland, who had to overcome many hardships throughout her life, ends up on the cover of Playboy. My biggest dream has come true. The Playboy invitation has helped me believe in myself even more. It has given me a lot of hope and belief that everything is possible and the world is waiting for me. An unforgettable experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. Thank you. The most beautiful things in my life always happen by accident. I remember the feeling of excitement when I received an invitation to the first Playboy. An unforgettable feeling, then came the next invitations from Playboy, and now I can reveal that there will be more in the future and other magazines, interviews, my guest appearances in artists' video clips. All this helped me believe in myself, in the fight against complexes, but above all, interacting and working with all these wonderful people photographers, models, musicians created me as an artist and I decided to start my own perfume brand which is created entirely by me and the scents are inspired by my memories from traveling to my magical places and my cosmetic brand to leave some kind of legacy and be able to fulfill my dreams about a foundation supporting young talents and people with autism.

Which three words describe you the best? I think is more than three lol: loyal, respectfull, honest, patient, optimistic, trustworthy, solid, goodhearted.

What's a childhood dream you've held on to? As a child, I dreamed of building wells and water infrastructure in Africa in the future to provide people living there with access to drinking water. It was my childhood dream to have an organization that helps people. I wanted to build schools and hospitals, to give something back, to help others live better in civilized conditions, to have enough food, medicine, and water.

What's a must-have item in your wardrobe right now? Honestly, my perfume. Wait, let me show you lol I love it. JustFetish by Joanne, the world has gone crazy for it; everyone wants it, especially after several publications in world-famous magazines.

If you could be any animal, what would you be and why? Maybe a beautiful butterfly so i could fly aswellmaybe in my ex life (because I believe in reincarnation), I was a butterfly because I'm multiented and my soul and generally life is so colorful like a butterfly. I even often have dreams in which I fly, and these dreams are so real, and how well I know the skills and memories from the past.

How do you define true success, and do you feel like you're living it? I think that the measure of success is the realization of your own dreams. I think that I have achieved some kind of success in my life, something that I can be proud of with my hard work, perseverance of character, but it is only thanks to you, my readers, and your support. I love you and I am always mentally with you.

What's the boldest decision you've ever made that changed your life? Without a doubt, it was leaving my homeland, which is Poland. It was the most difficult experience that shaped me into who I am today.

What's one thing you've always wanted to do but haven't dared to try yet? Definitely a parachute jump and a balloon flight.

A lot of young women look up to you. What advice would you give them on pursuing their own dreams? One of the most important lessons I have learned in my life is: be true to myself. This means not just in my personal life, but at work, too. Quite a few people have challenged me over the years, saying that you can't run a business based on personal values. But I completely disagree. You need to identify the opportunity, act on it, and not give up until you have a solution. Try not to change under pressure from others, be yourself, be authentic and natural. My basic value is respect and loyalty. I treat others the way I would like to be treated. In my career I've had lots of moments when I feel I've achieved something and also lots of other moments when something has gone wrong. I've learned that it helps to use neither to define who you can are or what you can achieve. There are days when you won't put in much effort, and everything good will fall in your lap. There are other days when you will try your hardest and nothing will go right. That's just life. But it important is to always remember Failure is a natural part of learning and an opportunity to grow. As I mentioned earlier. Even if stones land on your face every day, be strong and fight adversity, and think positively. I am the best example that the impossible is possible. In moments of failure, don't waste time analyzing your mistakes. They are your lesson for a better future. I want to go down in history as an icon of style and class. People with a great appetite for life, I think that I am already becoming an inspiration for people, that it is worth believing in dreams, because you just have to believe in yourself and start fulfilling them. I believe that the recipe for success is hard work and determination. I am an example that the concept of impossible does not exist, starting from the covers of Playboy to the covers of the most prestigious magazines. Additionally, I have developed my cosmetic brand focusing on perfume design, which was immediately picked up by the leading magazines on the market, making my perfume brand "JustFetish by Joanne" recognizable on the market. Currently, I have already appeared on several covers of magazines with bottles of my perfumes, and I already have more invitations to the next ones, as well as invitations to participate in perfume shows in the USA and Europe.

Is there a dream brand or platform you'd love to work with? For years, I have had a great fondness for the Louis Vuitton brand; it is an icon of style for me. Just as my grandmother was once for me. She infected me with love for this brand, it is the story of my grandmother's youth interwoven with war memories of her emigration and return to Poland with all her belongings locked in a Louis Vuitton trunk, which we found together in a dark corner of the basement as children. It has always been with me, later as a coffee table and a designer piece of equipment. I still have it today. The same story also applies to my perfumes, these are the scents of childhood, one of them I will recreate my grandmother's favorite scent. The essence of omnipotence is locked in a retro bottle. It was my grandmother who told me that if I work hard, one day I will buy myself a Louis Vuitton bag. For years, I have been a loyal collector of accessories of this brand, an ambassador and guest invited to special Louis Vuitton shows, I pose for photos with accessories of this brand, and I even appeared on the cover of Playboy.

I am currently focusing on my perfume brand „JustFetish by Joanne." In the future, I intend to continue designing home decoration accessories and interior design, which I have done before when decorating my hotels.

What are your future goals? I dream of a happy family and achieving my goals. I want to establish a Foundation for children with Touret's syndrome. It's a cause close to my heart for certain reasons. My greatest dream is to complete a biography about my life. It was not a bed of roses with many tears and sacrifices. It will include my memories and motivate people to never give up and have faith the sun always comes after the storm.

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned in your career as a model? One of the most important lessons I have learned in my life is: be true to myself. This means not just in my personal life, but at work, too. Quite a few people have challenged me over the years, saying that you can't run a business based on personal values. But I completely disagree. You need to identify the opportunity, act on it, and not give up until you have a solution. Try not to change under pressure from others, be yourself, be authentic and natural. My basic value is respect and loyalty. I treat others the way I would like to be treated.

What's the most valuable lesson you've learned in your career? In my career, I've had lots of moments when I feel I've achieved something and also lots of other moments when something has gone wrong. I've learned that it helps to use neither to define who you can be or what you can achieve. There are days when you won't put in much effort, and everything good will fall in your lap. There are other days when you will try your hardest and nothing will go right. That's just life. But it important is to always remember failure is a natural part of learning and an opportunity to grow. As I mentioned earlier. Even if stones land on your face every day, be strong and fight adversity, think positively. I am the best example that the impossible is possible. In moments of failure, don't waste time analyzing your mistakes. They are your lesson for a better future.

Who is your celebrity crush? I am a big fan of Lady Gaga because she is a multi-talented person as a singer and actress dancer, but she also has a very interesting character, and her vision of looking at the world motivates and inspires. From the world of FHM, Playboy, and this industry, is definitely Pamela Anderson, but also Anna Nicole Smith - many people tell me that I am supposedly similar to her, haha. I recommend watching documentaries about their lives on Netflix; they are very inspiring.

What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? The worst thing you can do to offend me is to treat anyone, including without respect. If you only respect the wealthy, it's unsavoury and unacceptable to me. Men who decorate themselves in expensive methods will be valuable, but in fact they are selfish, false and disloyal, and disrespectful to women. Wealth comes from within; it cannot be bought with any amount of money. To win my heart, be a caring, good-natured, loyal individual. You will love me for who I am, my character, not what I have or don't have as a benefit for you. I only like a well-mannered gentleman who treats me like a lady, be old-fashioned with good manners. Thank you.

What has been your favorite project or collaboration to date? For sure, Playboy it all started with him, he opened the door to international fame, participation in many photo shoots, interviews for travel magazines meeting wonderful people. founding a cosmetics brand. Playboy gave me wings. It's an unforgettable experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. Thank you for this wonderful gift from God. I never dreamt that one day I would be in Playboy; it's a blessing. It's like a fairy tale, how an ordinary girl from a small town in Poland, who had to overcome many hardships throughout her life, ends up on the cover of Playboy. My biggest dream has come true. The Playboy invitation has helped me believe in myself even more. It has given me a lot of hope and belief that everything is possible and the world is waiting for me. An unforgettable experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. Thank you.

What does a typical day in your life look like? When I wake up, I squeeze fresh orange juice, I look through my mail, I go to the park with my dog. Then, when I come back, I make my favorite coconut latte macchiato, tabbouleh salad, definitely with pomegranate seeds and fresh mint. I put on my favorite music, and that's my time for meditation. Then some yoga exercises - a few deep breaths and I'm ready for the whole day. My daily routine have photo shoots for magazines, interviews, make-up, hairdresser, beautician. I go to the factory where we create perfume scents in the laboratory. I'm just finishing work on my own line of make-up and candles, and air fresheners for the home. Every day of mine is intense, but I love it. When I have a lot of things to do, I feel alive.

How do you stay motivated and focused in a fast-paced industry? From my experience, if you are very busy, you don't focus on details but on organizational issues, and I think this is the key to success. You just have to remember about healthy eating, and the rest will take care of itself. Because when I am very busy and have a tight schedule, I can find more free time than when I have a looser schedule, it turns me into laziness, and then I don't have time for anything.

What's your philosophy when it comes to balancing work and personal life? My philosophy on work-life balance is to prioritize intentionality and flexibility, meaning actively managing my time to dedicate quality moments to both my professional commitments and personal well-being, understanding that the balance may shift depending on life circumstances, while always striving to maintain a healthy separation between the two spheres to avoid burnout.

What's one thing you do every day to keep yourself grounded and happy? Staying grounded means for me being able to stay calm and connect with my core self in the face of uncertainty. Practicing physical wellness: Exercise daily, eat nutritious food, and prioritize quality sleep, spending time in nature, connecting with your senses, and listening to music that reminds you of something positive. All of these little things are rituals that make you fell better, even life sometimes can be hard and can be like balm for body and spirit. Repeating positive statements: Say kind statements to yourself, or repeat coping or safety statements.

What are some hobbies or passions you enjoy outside of work? I love helping others; this is the meaning of my life, especially for children with autism and Tourette's. Thanks to hard work, I managed to create my own cosmetic brand. I design my own perfume scents, and all this in order to establish a Foundation for children with Touret's syndrome. It's a cause close to my heart for certain reasons. My greatest dream is to complete a biography about my life. It was not a bed of roses with many tears and sacrifices. It will include my memories and motivate people to never give up and have faith that the sun always comes after the storm.

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be and why? Modeling allows me to travel a lot, thanks to it, I have visited many interesting places, but there is still a lot to discover. I think that the place is not really of great importance, but the people you are around, they create places... You can be on a paradise beach alone with no one to talk to and enjoy the views together, and then you have the impression that it doesn't matter where but with whom. You can be at home in front of the TV watching Netflix and have someone to cuddle up to - then you are in paradise. As I said earlier, places are created by people, not the other way around.

Which piece of clothing makes you feel confident and empowered when wearing it? I think that an elegant classic suit with my long red nails and red lipstick. I know what impression it makes on people lol. Generally, I wouldn't focus so much on the elements of clothing here, but my red nails, the color, length, and shape of which are the same, unchanging over the years, are the key element of clothing that people often pay attention to. They are my characteristic distinguishing mark, hehe. I can even be in a tracksuit for a walk in the park, and everyone always compliments my manicure, very often even women. I feel well-groomed and dressed when I have a perfect manicure.

What's your favorite guilty-pleasure snack or meal? Mmm.. frozen yogurt with fruit and pistachio sauce is divine. I go for long Nordic walks so I can eat what I want lol.

How do you unwind and recharge after a busy day? I take an aromatic candlelight bath accompanied by my favorite classical music and Macha tea; it's a real ritual for body and soul.

What message do you hope to convey through your work? As mentioned above before, by not judging people by their cover, to support and help each other, not to be jealous and selfish. Every day, try to be the best version of yourself and treat others as you would like to be treated. Be your natural self, don't try to change under the pressure of others. Even if stones land on your face every day, be strong and fight adversity, and think positively. I am the best example that the impossible is possible. Stay strong and believe in yourself, and your dreams will come true. Thank you for spending this time getting to know me. Always sending you Love and best wishes. Cristal xx

How Does an Escort Find a Boyfriend?

Hint: It's Not Easy

BY **TIM STRUBY** ILLUSTRATION BY **ELVIS BARLOW-SMITH**

What's an escort to do when a potential romantic partner can't recognize that a blow job is just a job? A year in the lives of high-end escorts as they navigate the snaking line between work and love

It was a balmy August night in New York City and Maggie couldn't recall the last time she'd felt butterflies. In a strappy blue dress, DKNY tennis sneakers and her brown hair in a ponytail, she'd walked the 14 blocks from her apartment to the north end of Union Square, where she began scanning the crowd. It didn't take long to find Rich. Sitting on a bench in jeans and a paisley shirt, Rich, a graphic designer, looked just like he had in his pictures: dark spiked hair, angular features, a preternaturally youthful 32-year-old. Maggie waved. He smiled. As they set off to grab a drink, the chemistry was as immediate and intense as it had been on the phone for the past week. When they got to the wine bar, he opened the door for her, wiped down the table. Compared to her last relationship—two months with a self-absorbed photographer—Rich was a thrilling breath of fresh air.

Yet even as they talked and laughed effortlessly, Maggie knew that no matter the connection, her career would be an issue. After a very religious middle-class childhood in the Bay Area, Maggie became a high-end provider, a.k.a. an escort, a sex worker—someone who charges upward of $1,000 an hour for services. The 30-year-old vegetarian is a classic beauty, an astrology-obsessed empath and she is unwaveringly proud of her profession. But as the fight for sex-work legalization builds momentum, she and her fellow providers face a more personal, constant struggle: dating, relationships and love.

Although the job perks include Michelin-star meals, first-class flights to exotic locations and cash—lots of cash—the life of a provider is often isolating. Emotionally draining. Occasionally traumatic. The nine women interviewed for this story by no means represent the vast spectrum of sex workers who engage in prostitution, a line of work that includes multiple class strata and myriad genders. Nor are they victims of trafficking or beholden to pimps. The choice to enter the business was, and still is, their own. And as glamorous as the work can be, their lives bear little resemblance to hackneyed pop-culture story lines.

"Mainstream society at large is able to romanticize sex workers," says Bre, a 28-year-old New Yorker who's been in the business for five years. "We look at [sex work] as the most beautiful, tragic love stories that ever can exist, and I hate the way all of them end: She gets saved, or she dies on the block."

But all the women interviewed for this story made one point very clear: The longer they remain in the business, the more they tend to understand the importance of a partner. The more many of them crave some sort of relationship.

"I have a monogamous mentality," says Maggie. "And just because we're sex workers doesn't mean we don't want love any less than anyone else."

Finding a significant other in the modern age is hard enough for anyone, let alone someone who has sex for a living. But providers are well aware of the challenge.

"It's complicated," admits Maggie. "You just have to bolster yourself for the ensuing battle."

So how do high-end providers meet potential paramours? No differently than most single people these days: dating apps like Bumble, Tinder, OkCupid and Hinge (where Maggie matched with Rich). The process, however, can be tricky. For obvious legal reasons, providers rarely reveal what they do for work on a dating profile. And since the apps are relatively sparse on personal information, escorts have to navigate around men who might react poorly to their profession. Red flags range from conservative politics to pictures from church functions to anyone who appears too buttoned up. Photos from Burning Man, kink pics and other progressive-alternative signals are encouraging. The most reliable app appears to be OkCupid, where members customarily provide more in-depth profiles.

"You can post questions related to sex work and get lots of good information," says Krista, a 37-year-old provider. "You can know ahead of time if they might be hostile or unpleasant about it."

Being a provider who's also a woman of color can lend another level of awareness to the process of vetting potential partners. "You have this double consciousness," says Bre. "I know that black women are hypersexualized; how does that work when you want to form a relationship with someone where you want to be your full self, but you also don't want that full self to be misrepresented or misinterpreted? Then add on the difficulty of being a sex worker, where, by virtue of the job, you are commodifying your sexuality. It's this really weird space, where you're having a conversation with a partner, and as a woman you need to figure out 'Is he a misogynist?' And as a black woman, you have to ask, 'Is he going to be misogynistic and racist?'"

Once they've waded into the dating pool, the next step is like diving headfirst into the deep end. Time for

"I've tried everything. I've been blunt, I've been delicate. I've asked if they've seen 'Pretty Woman'."

"the talk." Coming clean with what they do for a living. "I couldn't have someone who didn't know what I did," says Sara, a 28-year-old escort. She isn't alone. Some high-end escorts tell those closest to them—friends, family—and this would obviously include a partner.

So it's not as much if they break the news to a potential boyfriend as when. "Definitely not the first date," laughs Maggie. "That's way too much information. But all girls have different comfort levels." Developing those comfort levels can take time; trust needs to build. But waiting too long has pitfalls as well. "I don't want to be one or two months in," she says, "then admit I've lied the whole time and this is what I actually do." With Rich, their instant rapport actually prompted Maggie to tell him over text before their first date.

How then to share this information? Again, every situation and every provider varies. "I've tried everything," explains Sara, who's been a provider for nearly three years. "I've been blunt, I've been delicate. I've asked if they've seen Pretty Woman." With one of her exes, she described herself as a "well-compensated, low-volume companion." Maggie prefers not to beat around the bush. "I say I'm in the sex industry," she says. "Then guys say, 'What does that mean?' I try to explain the job. But I ask, 'Look, how much do you want to know?'"

Rich wanted to know a lot. He wasn't at all like the guy who'd called Maggie a "cum bucket" when she'd told him. Or the guy who said, "You must really know how to fuck a man." Or the guy who screamed, "You're going to give me HIV!" Still, sometimes Rich's inquisitiveness concerned Maggie. Regular inquiries about her clients' dick sizes, asking if she genuinely enjoyed having sex with these men. But they worked through it. Their lives became more and more intertwined. Within a few months Maggie felt "all the bs was gone," and they were building a foundation. She was in love.

Krista met Vic at a party in Brooklyn. They too had instant attraction. Who could blame them? The redheaded Krista grew up in a Southern California suburb, matriculated to an Ivy League college and possessed a fierce passion for politics and feminism. Vic was a tech consultant from South America, sharp and witty—that dry humor Krista adored. She'd felt so comfortable with him that on their first date she told him she was a sex worker.

"He said, 'Okay,'" recalls Krista. They quickly became an item and Vic proved to be warm and emotionally supportive.

What Vic wasn't, was jealous. "He had no curiosity about work," says Krista. "I don't think he saw much use in knowing. My assumption was he thought, I know what sex looks like." Her theory is that certain people—herself included—aren't biologically programmed with sexual jealousy. "You can tell if they are, fast," Krista adds. "They try to hide it, but they still ask questions to scratch that itch."

Someone like Vic is a rare find, because the work is all about sex. Despite the "escort" connotations, Krista isn't simply accompanying some lonely gentleman to the theater and then heading home. She's sleeping with (primarily) older, married, wealthy men. Those bookings might include the theater or dinner at Eleven Madison Park or a week in Tuscany, but regardless of the trappings, the modern day high-end provider is still practicing the world's oldest profession.

But no matter the programming, falling for someone can make the job excruciating. Especially during the "honeymoon" period of a new relationship. Providers talk about the euphoria of that first weekend with a new partner, living in a cloud of dopamine and serotonin, not thinking about eating or drinking, the two of them just lying in bed all day. Inevitably, explains Krista, that e-mail arrives. A job. Krista tried a variety of ways to cope. Sometimes she'd think of Vic while having sex with a client. Other times she completely blocked Vic out of her mind. "I never came up with an optimal way," she admits.

While the providers grudgingly go to work, they all attest that the sex with clients is nothing like it is at home. They use words like performative, robotic and perfunctory to describe "work sex." That's not to say it's bad, especially with clients they like, but it's not real. "I get to have orgasms," says one escort who asked not to be named. "But they're empty." Intimacy with significant others is genuine, connective and, maybe most important, healing.

"But it can get weird," says Bre about having a significant other who knows what she does for a living. Example: "You're super tired, and they're like, 'How was work?' 'Oh, it was great. I pissed in a champagne cup and then this guy drank it.' And they're like, 'Would you want to try that with me?' I'm like, 'No!'"

Which is not to say that sex in their personal lives is boring. Surprisingly, most providers say they're far kinkier with their loved ones than with the men paying them. In addition to partners providing a safer space for experimentation, the real thrill for many clients is the mere idea of an escort. "I'm actually vanilla with my clients," says Suzanne, a 27-year-old escort working toward her MBA. None of her clients ask to explore sexual fantasies with her "because I'm the fantasy. Not the sex acts."

During their first year together, Krista can't remember a single argument with Vic. They fit perfectly; their life together was easy. One night, while they cooked dinner at her apartment, Vic told Krista he loved her. She laughed.

"I don't care how cool he is; for the next 30 years his line at the end of an argument will always be, 'You're a fucking whore.'"

"I was like, 'I've known I've loved you for months.'"

When Josie started escorting three and a half years ago, she looked at it as a refreshing "time out" from the dating scene. The 41-year-old from Montreal loathed the apps and thought the guys in New York City only wanted to get laid. Not only was she able to focus on her health, wellness and meditation practices, but setting up a business as an independent escort required a hell of a lot of trial and error, a process she couldn't exactly google. "There's a lot to figure out that first year," laughs one escort. "You're learning on your feet—and your back." But as Josie got established and developed a steady clientele, she started to sense a common void.

"I wanted that intimacy," she admits. "That partner, that companionship."

Yet Josie was reluctant. Unlike many high-end providers, she didn't want to reveal her identity. Didn't feel comfortable doing it. On dates, she claimed she was divorced or in fitness training or didn't need to work. "People don't really ask questions based on that answer," she says. The covers proved effective, although Josie realized they undermined her entire purpose. "I know I'm going to have to lie to somebody," she says. "And what's the point of dating someone with a prospect of a possible future when you start it with a lie?"

Then, through a social media account—one that used her real identity—she connected with Alan, a TV producer. He lived in Atlanta. She had friends there she regularly visited. One night they met for margaritas in Buckhead, and soon she was flying to Georgia every few weeks. They had long dinners, went to Braves games and both liked trying different things in the bedroom.

Weeks turned into months, yet still Josie didn't disclose her livelihood. Not without good reason. Revealing that information—particularly their work aliases—can throw unsuspecting men for a serious loop.

Take Maggie: Her boyfriend Rich looked up her website, Twitter feed and Instagram account. While Maggie didn't brag about lavish trips and pricey gifts from clients like many high-end providers, she did post racy selfies. She offered a "girlfriend experience" as well as duos with other female escorts. Rich wanted to know why she never sent him any nude selfies, why she didn't act that adventurous when they were together. She tried to explain that social media was all smoke and mirrors. The duos with other escorts came with the job; it wasn't who she was.

"He felt threatened," Maggie recalls. "He felt like I was pretending with him. That it wasn't real."

As if that wasn't incendiary enough, some escorts (including Josie) post client reviews on their websites—detailed accounts of their high-priced assignations. Highly complimentary? Without question. But the lurid play-by-play might send even the least sexually jealous boyfriend into an apoplectic rage.

Sometimes telling the truth can be simply dangerous. Maggie cites an evening when a date she'd recently told came close to assaulting her. Several providers mentioned escorts who'd been outed by angry exes on infamous gossip website the Dirty. Suzanne will never forget the warning she once got from the owner of an escort agency where she once worked.

"He told me, 'Never tell anyone,'" she says. "'Because I don't care how cool he is, for the next 30 years his line at the end of an argument will always be, You're a fucking whore.'"

After eight months commuting to Atlanta, Josie's relationship with Alan came to a head. "At what point am I going to have to tell this person or get out?" laments Josie. "It came to that. I either do or I don't. I didn't."

Josie called Alan and broke it off. She blamed the distance.

For several months, Maggie and Rich sailed smoothly. They traveled to Europe together. She met his brother. But as her feelings deepened, she began to sense a distance in him. A disconnect. When she'd say "I love you," he wouldn't respond. Comments about her job resurfaced, little daggers like, "What do you do all day?" and, "The sex is really bad with your clients, right?" But the red flags turned into a warning siren when Rich had a family wedding. He didn't invite Maggie.

"Why not?" she asked him, holding back tears. "Because you don't see me in your future? Why are you hiding me? Keeping me away?"

Rich's gradual 180 isn't a revelation in provider circles. All the women interviewed for this story have encountered guys who say they don't have a problem dating a sex worker. They mean it too. But it's impossible to really know what it's like, how they will react, until they do it. Good intentions don't qualify as actual understanding. Maggie tells the story of a "lovely young man" she briefly dated. When she told him she was an escort, he smiled and replied that it didn't matter what she does; it only matters what kind of person she is. "I thought that was really sweet," says Maggie. "But it's all well and good to say that before you're shoulders deep in a relationship and mama has to go out and blow someone."

Yet that's precisely what dating an escort requires. Recognizing a blow job as a job and nothing more. "I always say to partners, 'I wish you could do this for one day and understand what it's really like,'" says Maggie. "Before I started I had no idea."

That lack of understanding fosters insecurity. Undermines trust. "And you have to trust your partner completely," insists Sara. "And he has to trust you." If those pieces are missing, boyfriends tend to grow resentful while providers feel more and more guilty.

"I felt guilty all the time about work," explains Maggie. Guilty about last-minute bookings, jobs over the holidays, trips out of town. "And I felt like I had to make up for it."

That means lots of mollycoddling. Constantly reassuring boyfriends that they're special, returning from a two-week tour and having sex with your partner, not because you want to but because you feel obligated. Tolerating behaviors that shouldn't be tolerated. "Rich liked things I wasn't so keen on," admits Maggie. "Like spanking really hard. I'd finally say, 'Don't do that—it hurts!'"

Many providers have not only found themselves in unhealthy relationships, but they've also stayed with those partners because they don't think they

"I always say to partners, ‘I wish you could do this for one day and understand what it’s really like.’"

can find somebody else who would be as accepting of their profession. “We invest so much in our partner because we know we have a special situation,” says Maggie. “And we need to compensate for almost everything that happens.” Inevitably, Rich couldn’t give Maggie the love and support she needed. That she’d explicitly asked him for. Every day was a whirlwind of emotions, from romantic heartbreak to existential mindfuck. “He made me question my job,” says Maggie. “People make you feel bad about it because you’re just doing it for the money. And that’s seen as dirty, you’re a slut, easy. I spoke to a therapist about it and she said to me, ‘Do you really want a man who’s okay with what you do?’”

“True. That’s hard!” agrees Josie. “The feminist in me says yes, but the romantic in me says hell no!”

It’s all part of the ongoing battle Maggie had spoken of. Battles that are often lost. Finally, one afternoon, she called Rich from her bed, crying. They couldn’t go on like this anymore, she said. The relationship was over. They never saw each other again.

“You can’t win,” she sighed. “I want someone to accept who I am and where I am at this point. Someone to love me for who I am and not what I do. It doesn’t define me. But do you still want a man who’s okay with you sleeping with other people?”

In January 2018, after two and a half years together, Krista and Vic found themselves in uncharted, unhappy waters. The surprise? The issues didn’t have a direct correlation to sex. Time was the first real issue. Krista began landing more jobs, and she’d specifically changed her marketing to attract longer bookings that took her out of both New York City and the United States for significant stretches. When a client is paying hefty sums for meals, dinners, hotels and time, a provider can’t just hop on the phone and start texting people. Especially a boyfriend. Not only is it rude, it’s bad for business.

“My last trip was five days,” explains Krista. “It’s like being on a date. I learned to do a lot of fast texting in the bathroom.”

Krista and Vic came up with a solution: After a booking with a client in, say, Paris, Vic would join Krista in France and the pair, flush with Krista’s cash, would go carousing through Europe. They had a blast. Yet Vic didn’t have the same schedule flexibility, and the travel eventually cost him his sales position.

“My income was going up, and he lost his job. It affected his self-esteem,” says Krista. “Then we stopped fucking. He didn’t want to. Men feel emasculated when they’re not working. But if I don’t have sex I’ll start to break down.”

To make matters worse, as the breadwinner, Krista started giving Vic money. To pay his rent, cover his bills, for some spending cash. The female as breadwinner of the American household isn't by any means a new phenomenon, but it can strain any straight relationship, especially when one of the couple has the unusual mindset of a female sex worker. "I had a problem supporting him," she admits. Not because she didn't love Vic, but because she began feeling like a client. Paying for Vic's company. That in turn made her question the nature of their entire relationship. Was it simply transactional? Was she being played? She started to suspect it was all an act, that Vic was only going through the motions for the money.

After an event one night, Krista came home and confronted Vic.

"I don't know if you love me anymore," she claimed. "And what would you do without me supporting you?"

"That's probably true," admitted Vic.

"Okay. This is over."

Not long after Josie had broken it off with Alan from Atlanta, a man in New York City piqued her interest. He was successful and charming; they had similar interests and fantastic chemistry. The sex was off the charts. Josie had been so at ease during their time together that she'd revealed her real name and talked about her "civilian" life. The catch? He was a client. And he'd repeatedly asked to take her on an off-the-clock date.

That wasn't radical in the realm of high-end providers. Many have dated a client at least once, and some say their closest, most honest relationships are with the regulars who pay them. Take Bre, for example, who couldn't be happier with her current significant other, who is not only a former client but is still married and in an open relationship. These clients provide a safe, albeit transactional, space where an escort can let her hair down without being judged or threatened.

So Josie agreed. They had fabulous sushi, sizzling banter and later went back to her place to have sex. But when he spent the night, it felt like, well, work. "He wouldn't leave," laughs Josie. "By the next afternoon, I'm like, 'I'm tired, get the fuck out.'" She gave off clear signals that she wanted solo time, but he refused to read them—a by-product, she thinks, of her job. "It was what he needed to make it feel like it wasn't a transaction," she says.

The disappointment over her client didn't last. Trying out an exclusive dating app, she connected with Simon. Someone, once again, who didn't live in the same city. For the next few months, they spoke every day. Sometimes for hours. "They were some of the most meaningful, in-depth conversations I've ever had," she recalls. "It gave me intimacy, but not the physical form. Emotional."

Before long, Simon was dropping the L-word. But Josie resisted. The two hadn't even met in person, and Josie hadn't revealed she was a sex worker. Yet, like last time, the deeper she got involved with Simon, the more the duplicity gnawed at her. "I feel great about what I do," she says. "It's the double life that makes me feel shitty. It's a constant struggle in this business."

Revealing the truth can be a scary proposition for a provider, especially when that information has been withheld for a long time. But it can also be liberating; it can help a relationship. Suzanne, the escort getting her MBA, vividly remembers the night she told her casual lover—after two years. "I was absolutely terrified. I was shaking," she says. "He said, 'I feel so much closer to you now that I know this about you.'"

Finally, Josie booked a trip to visit Simon. She planned to see him for a few weeks to ensure their face-to-face connection was as powerful as what they'd been feeling for the past six months. Yet two days before she was scheduled to leave, Josie pulled the plug.

"I'm constantly in a conversation with myself because I want to live an honest life," she says with a tinge of frustration. "But what's my truth? Am I seeking these situations because deep down I don't feel worthy of a real relationship?"

The struggles continue. Since splitting with Rich, Maggie has had a string of disappointing dates. Josie has all but given up on love for now, focusing her energy instead on wellness and traveling abroad. "There aren't really any books on how to date a hooker," says Suzanne. But what if the laws changed? What if the sex-work industry were legalized? Would the challenges to finding love remain? Maggie is confident they would.

"I'd feel safer divulging the information to a partner earlier," she says. "But I don't think dating or relationships would be easier. The problem is the patriarchy, regardless of the legalities."

There was, however, one encouraging sign: Krista and Vic, who eventually got a job in the health care industry. "We're back on," she explains. "He's a delightful, beautiful man, and he feels like my partner. I see a future together."

The future. That, too, providers have to consider. Escorts don't intend to be in the business forever, as there is normally a shelf life to the job. Relationships are inevitable. That said, most of the providers interviewed for this story aren't imagining themselves as part of some Norman Rockwell narrative.

"I know for a fact I'll never have a conventional lifestyle," says Maggie.

One of the escorts I spoke with agrees. "Why not go on an hour 'date' once a month?" she replies when asked about continuing to work if she gets married. "Why turn down that money I could put away for savings? I could see myself doing that, but it's kind of hard to gauge now."

Whatever form of relationship they find, what will providers tell their partners of their past lives as sex workers? A few don't intend to say anything. Several envision telling their significant other but underplaying their participation and "leaving out the nitty-gritty," in the words of one provider. Most of them, however, feel like Maggie.

"I would be straightforward," she says. "This is going to be a part of me no matter if it's the present or the past. Whoever I wind up with is going to have to be okay with it."

Some names and minor details have been changed for privacy.

"My last trip was five days.... I learned to do a lot of fast texting in the bathroom."

Avidlove x Angel Melissa

Angel Melissa

Model **@angelmelissas**

Photography by **Jundjee**
Lingerie **Avidlove**
HMUA **Angel Melissa**

Such an absolute honour to have you on Playboy: Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? I took some training in high school on the weekends to learn posing, runway, etc, and I was also a constant in the Miss teen Colorado pageant.

What's a project or goal you're currently working on that you're really excited about? I'm planning to do mini man over style reels for people to watch my work.

What is at the top of your list to achieve the most in 2025? Well, actually, to be the happiest I've ever been, it may sound simple, but no matter how much you achieve, if you're not happy in life, it won't be as sweet.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? Great question, yes, definitely intelligence is important to me, which I think people might not know about me, but I'm a big nerd, haha! So I like to have conversations about so many different topics and educate people on the things I've learned and vice versa. On the strong suit, I find that being a soft woman makes me strong; it's our strength as a woman. I think that showing people that anyone can do it, too, is important to me.

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry? Probably the fact that I'm a curvy Latina, more on the natural side, and bring energy into my content.

What are some of your biggest passions? Manifestation, energy, nature, and I'm actually into natural healing, and of course, fashion.

If you weren't in the entertainment world, what career would you love to explore? Probably something to do with a healing or manifesting coach.

3 ultimate deal breakers when it comes to men? He has to be a gentleman, Have goals and working on them, and needs to treatment me amazing.

We are taking you out on your ultimate date, and we really want to knock this one out of the ballpark. What would that entail? Something special to stand out, but probably a set up dinner with candles and flowers on the beach, or a helicopter ride and dinner.

What are some of the things that attract you to a man? Being a divine masculine man, which is different from a macho one, and intelligent for sure, and having a sense of humor, and must be positive.

You have one last chance to do something you have always wanted to do, with no limits on anything. What are you doing? Go on a three-week travel adventure.

That said, what advice would you give to all the women out there when it comes to love and relationships? I think it's important to manifest what you want before it happens and to focus on the positive. Hold your boundaries strong. Know your worth and then add tax, baby.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work?
@angelmelissas.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? Whatever you've been wanting to do, don't put it off, wear the clothes now, not save them for a special occasion, and write down all your dreams and goals, big and small, as much as you can. Thank you for taking the time to read this. Sending good vibes!

Dive Into the Sweet and Uncomfortable World of *Honey and Prue*

BY LIZ SUMAN

Meet the photographic duo reimagining conventional representations of beauty and sexuality

Body Pour

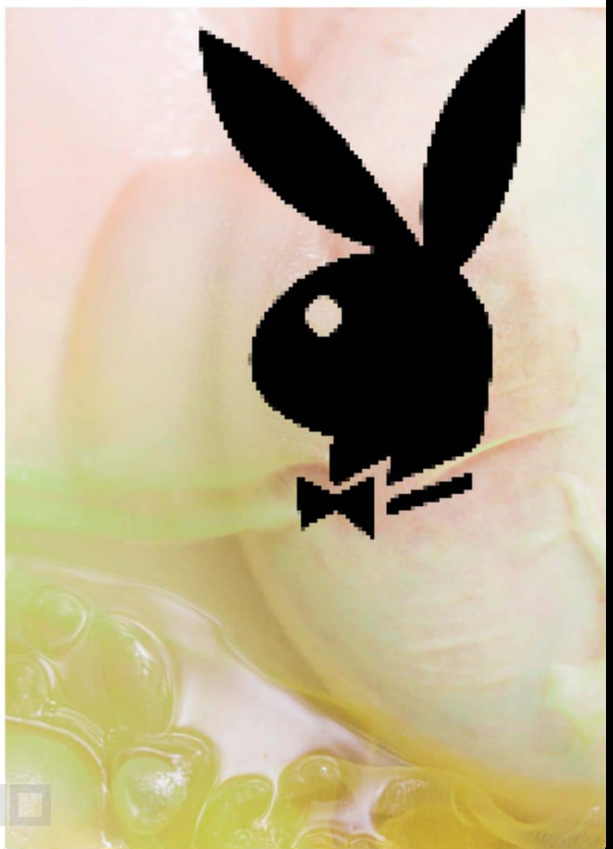
Frangipani Float

For collaborators and friends Honey Long and Prue Stent, intimacy and anonymity often mean the same thing. The photographers' immersive images feature juicy blue tongues smashed together, lush body parts drenched in wet pink fabric and naked, faceless bodies dancing behind a filmy green screen.

Whether soaking a torso in gray paint or concealing a subject in a field of lily pads, the Australia-based artists are masters of blending vivid colors and tactile materials with nudity and nature, using these juxtapositions as tools to recast classic representations of beauty and sexuality in unexpected ways. The viewer is left with a visceral, sometimes uncomfortable sense of intimacy that's heightened by the fact that their subjects are unidentifiable.

The artists' latest body of work is no exception. "Textural screens entice the viewer while also distancing them from the subjects so that they remain elusive," says the pair of their new exhibit, Touching Pool, currently on view at Arc One Gallery in Melbourne and pictured below. "For us, this creates a sense of suspended desire—like viewing lifeforms in an aquarium. You want to be in their world, but all you can do is press yourself against the glass."

For a multisensory viewing experience, play the exhibit's audio accompaniment, "Touching Pool," by Honey Long and Prue Stent; produced by Chris Ellis



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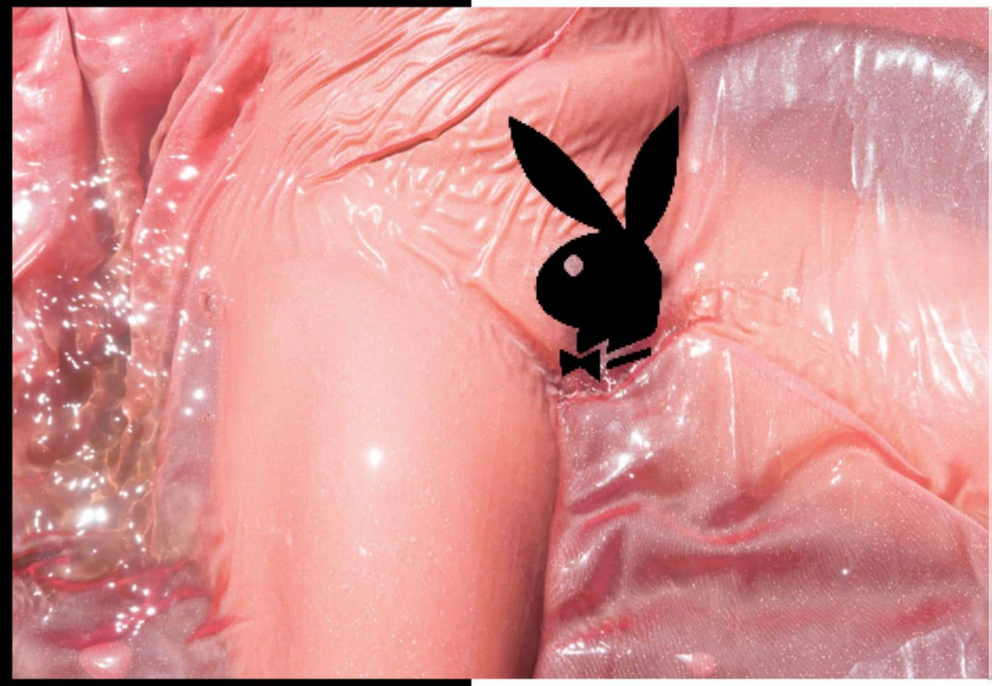

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Blue Tongue

Water Trace

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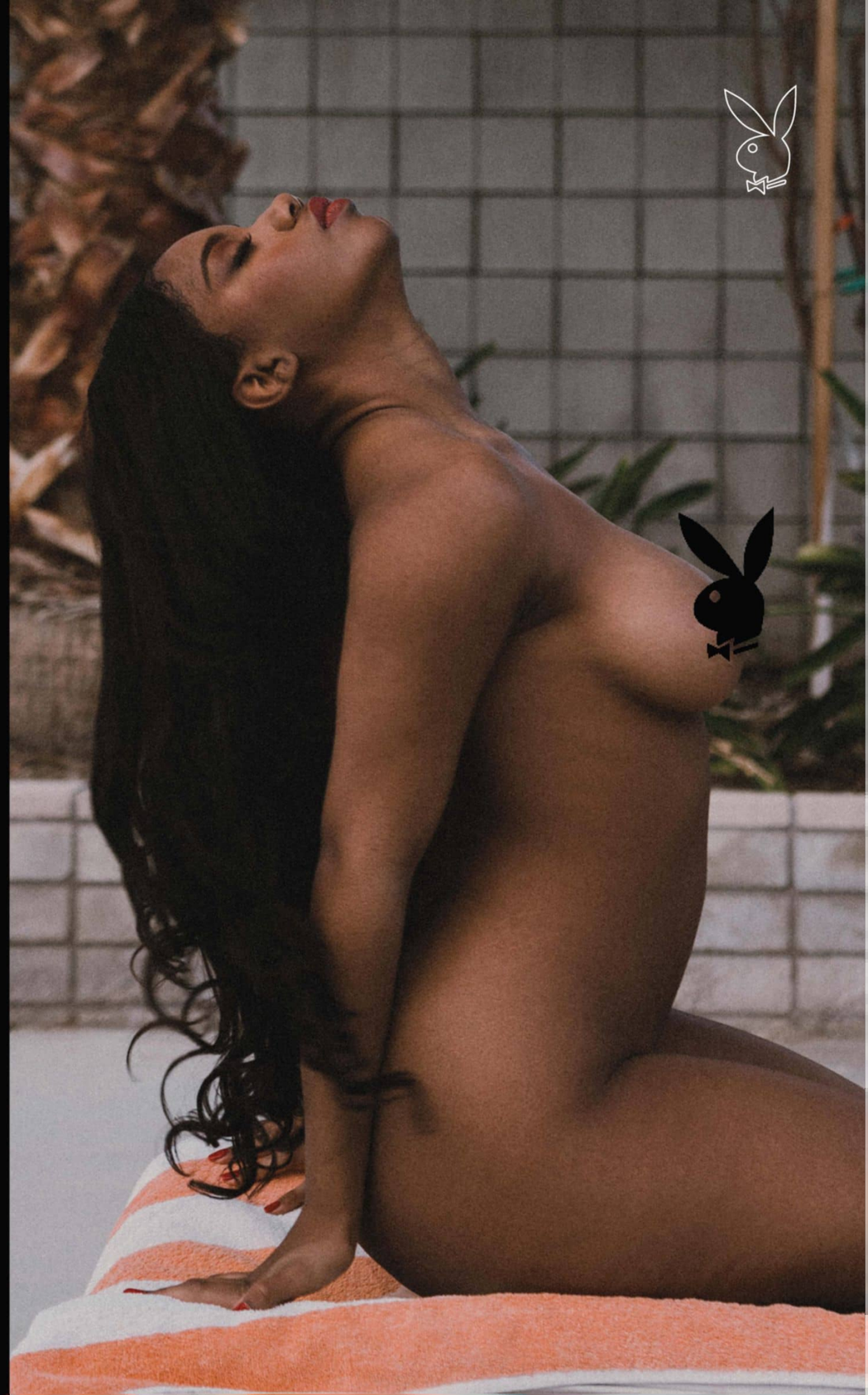

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